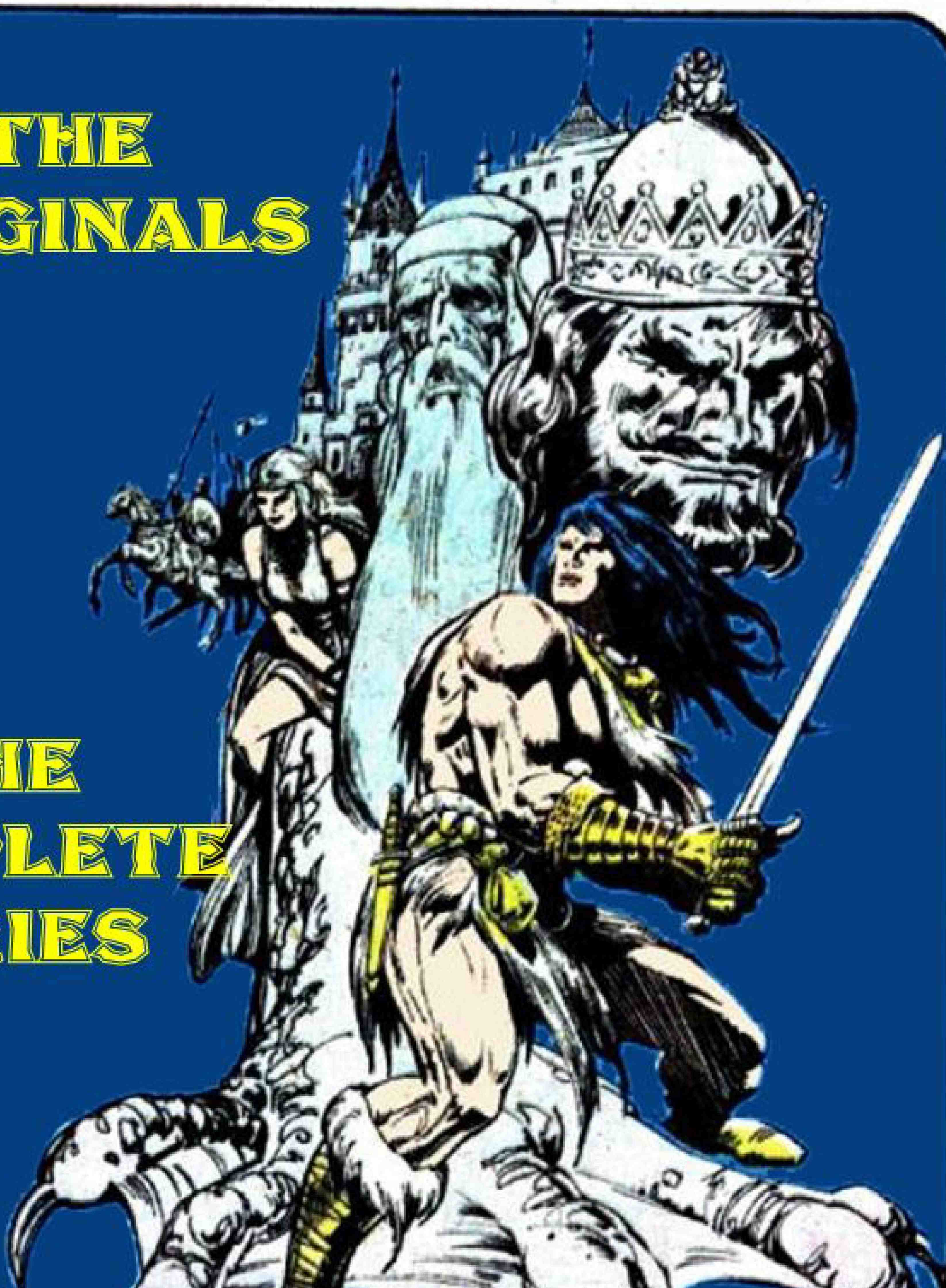
THE ORIGINALS

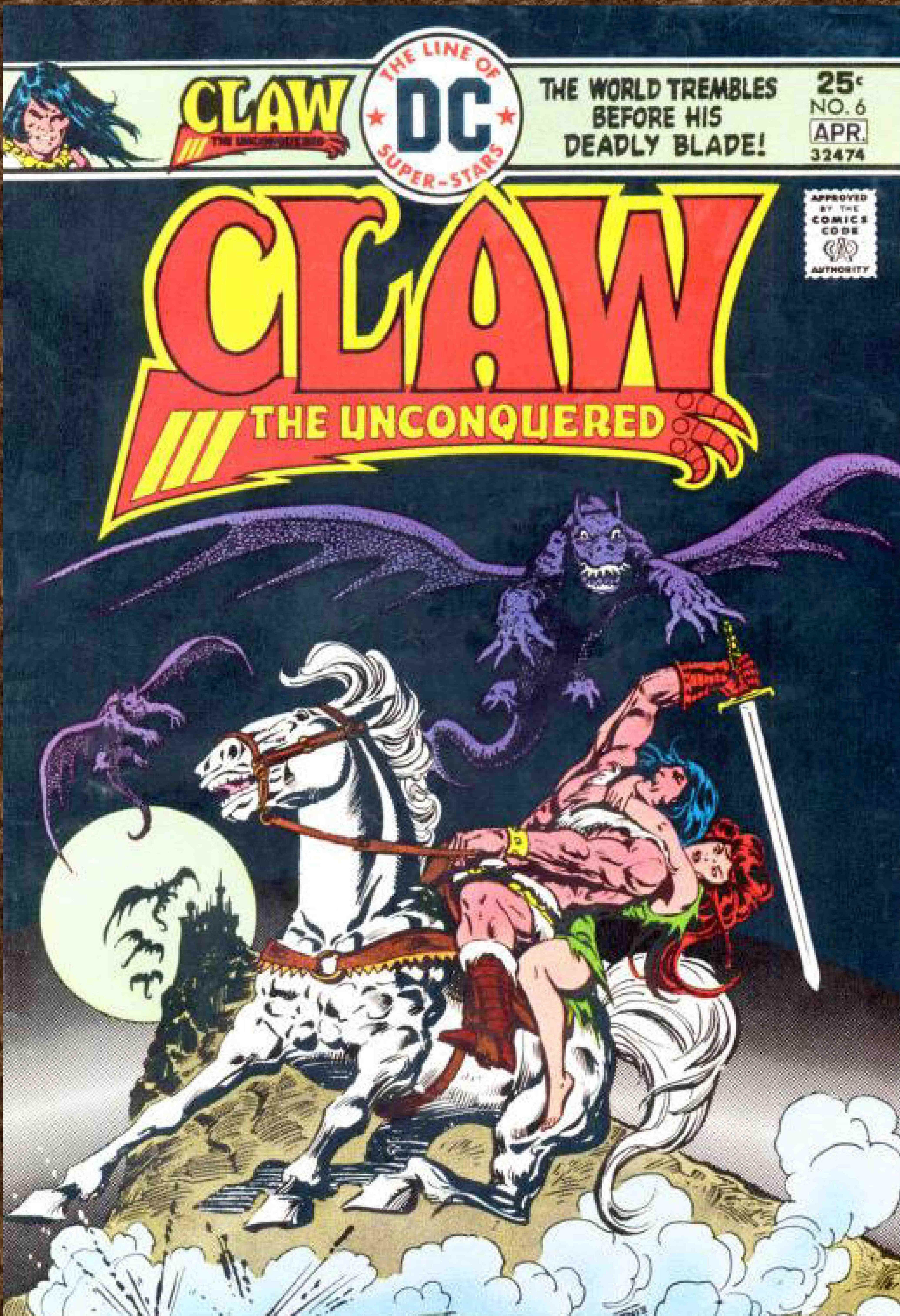
THE COMPLETE SERIES



CLAW THE UNCONQUERED

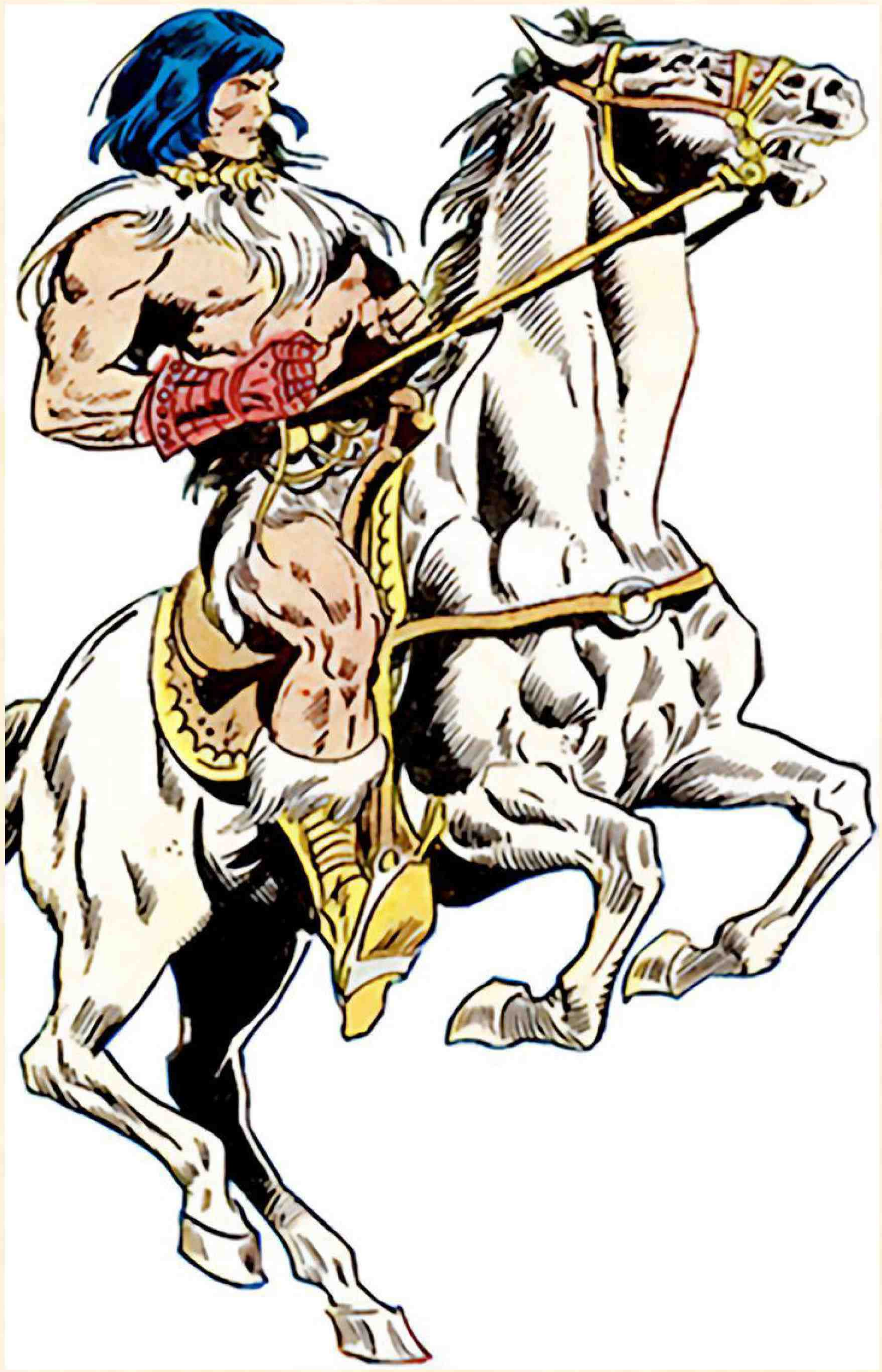
VOL. 1
1975-05
1976-03

BIBLIOTHECA VIRTUALIS


CLAW
THE LINE OF DC SUPER-STARS
THE WORLD TREMBLES BEFORE HIS DEADLY BLADE!
25¢
NO. 6
APR.
32474
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
CLAW
THE UNCONQUERED

À la suite du succès de *Conan le Barbare* chez Marvel, DC Comics riposte et crée une succession de sagas telles que *Sword of Sorcery* (1973) ou encore *Warlord* (1976). À celles-ci d'autres suivront à l'instar d'*Arak*, *Son of Thunder* (1981), *Dragonlance* (1988) ou encore *Atlantis Chronicles* (1990) mais aucune ne sera à la hauteur des espérances du grand public, hormis *Dragonlance*.

Claw est la troisième série d'Heroic fantasy créée en 1975 après *Beowulf Dragonslayer* (avril) et avant *Stalker* (juin).



Le sort de la série est confié à David Michelinie au scénario et Ernie Chan au dessin. Le premier est alors un jeune auteur prometteur et d'ailleurs sa contribution au mythe de Claw est très honnête, si l'on considère qu'il s'agit d'une figure imposée consistant à faire une copie carbone de Conan.

Quant à Ernie Chan, c'est déjà un artiste confirmé qui s'est d'ailleurs frotté à Conan puisqu'il a dessiné plusieurs histoires du barbare chez Marvel dans un style qui pastichait peu ou prou celui de John Buscema, dont il fut l'assistant.

Pour autant qu'on ne s'y trompe pas, par rapport au duo Thomas/Buscema qui officie au même moment ou presque avec Conan chez Marvel, cette série là est quand même un cran au-dessous. Le dessinateur d'origine philippine va illustrer les 7 premiers épisodes, tous de 18 planches, signant les 3 premiers sous le nom d'Ernie Chua. Il est remplacé ensuite par Keith Giffen dès le #8, Ricardo Villagran intervenant également dans ce même numéro mais étant absent par la suite.

Commencée en mai 1975, la série poursuit normalement son cours jusqu'au #9 (septembre 1976). À cette date, la revue cesse de paraitre pour ne reprendre qu'en avril 1978 très normalement au #10.

Mais DC qui a multiplié les créations (57 entre 1975 et 1978 !) est allé trop loin et trop vite. C'est ce qu'on a appelé depuis la DC Implosion. Une trentaine de revues furent purement et simplement supprimées. Si pour une dizaine d'entre elles, la chose étant plus ou moins programmée depuis quelque temps déjà, *Challengers of the Unknown*, *Metal Men*, *Karate Kid*, etc. pour les autres, dont *Claw*, *Kamandi*, *The Witching Hour*, etc. la surprise fut totale et se traduisit par le licenciement de 40 % du personnel de DC.

Lorsque la décision fut prise les numéros 13 et 14 de *Claw* étaient déjà écrits et dessinés, Romeo Tanghal remplaçant Keith Giffen.

À partir des planches crayonnées, donc avant leur encrage et leur mise en couleur, DC tira en photocopies 35 exemplaires de *Cancelled Comic Cavalcade*. Ces deux numéros de 400 et 500 pages (été et automne 1978) n'ont jamais eu vocation à être vendus, même si les couvertures indiquent un prix de 10 cents pour le premier et 1 $ pour le second. De même l'ours propose un abonnement annuel de 10 $ pour les États-Unis et de 9,50 $ pour l'étranger !

Il s'agit, on le voit davantage d'un cri de rage puisque ce prix de 10 cents ramenait au prix encore en vigueur dans les années 1960, période ou la moindre revue tirait fréquemment à plusieurs centaines de milliers d'exemplaires.

Toujours est-il que des photocopies de ces exemplaires, eux-mêmes issus d'une photocopieuse. Puis des photocopies de photocopies et ainsi de suite. La qualité des documents que l'on peut voir ici et là sur le net est donc très aléatoire.

Pour autant on pourrait penser que la valeur des 35 exemplaires originaux atteindrait des sommets. Il n'en est rien puisque

le *Comic Book Guide Price* estimait la valeur des deux numéros à 3.600 $ en 2011. Si la somme est rondelette elle doit être comparée à d'autres comics. Ainsi le *Fun Comics* #60 (1940) en excellent état se négociait alors à plus de 10.000 $, alors que ce numéro n'a en soi rien d'exceptionnel

À vous de chevaucher désormais en compagnie du héros.

Garches, le 18 octobre 2022

LISTE DES ÉPISODES

Tous ces épisodes sont signés David Michelinie (scénario) et Ernie Chan (dessin)

1. The Sword and the Silent Scream! -
2. The Doom That Came to K'Dasha-Dheen
3. The Bloodspear
4. The Coming of N'hglthss
5. . Grimstone Quest!
6. The Sunset Doom of Dhylka-Ryn -

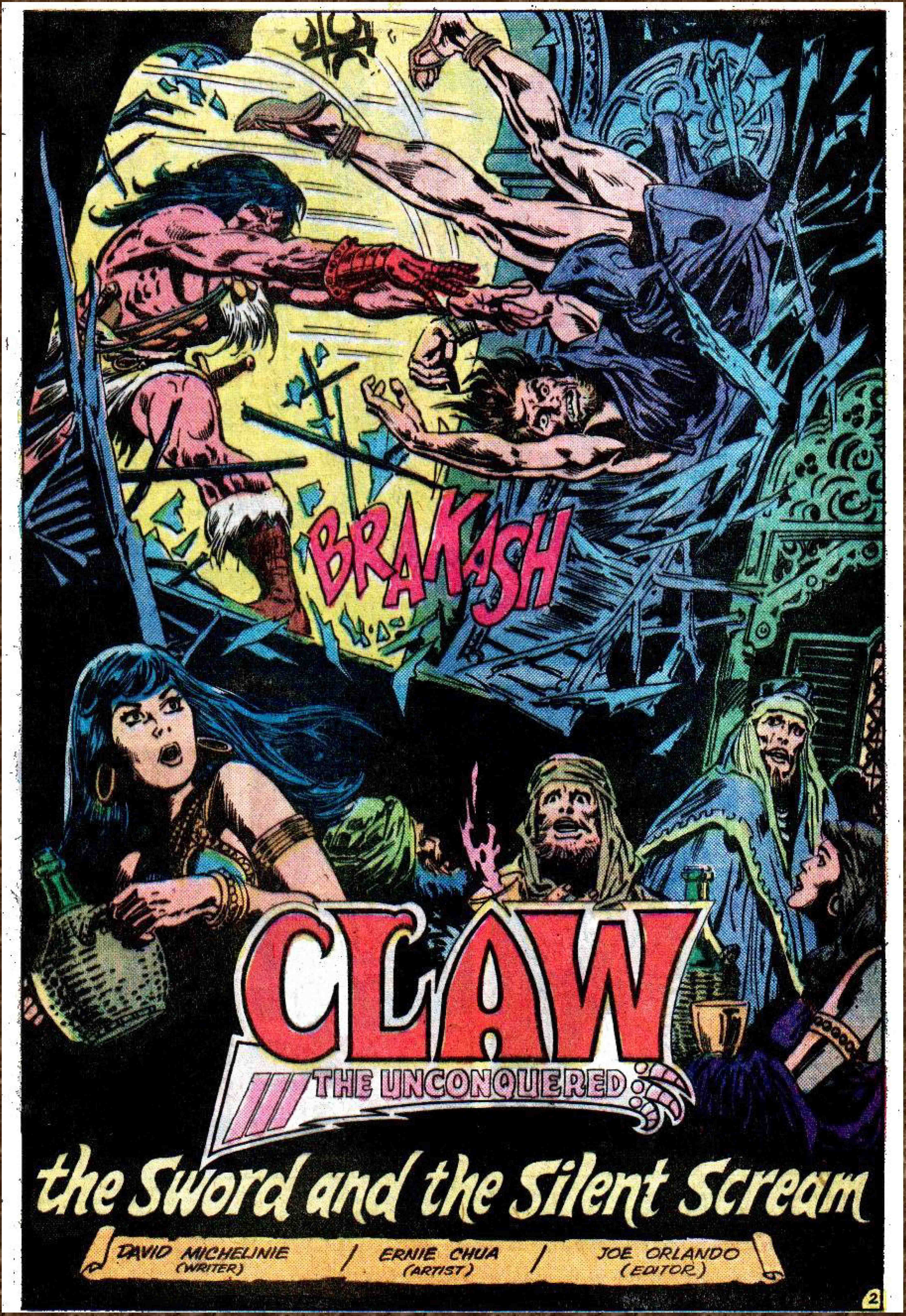


NB : Ce texte de présentation est intégralement tiré de la page Wikipédia. Outre le fait que c'est autorisé à condition de mentionner la source, j'ai d'autant moins de scrupules à le faire que c'est moi qui ai créé la page en 2013 et en ai rédigé la plus grande partie.



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BRAKASH
CLAW
THE UNCONQUERED
the Sword and the Silent Scream
DAVID MICHELINIE (WRITER) / ERNIE CHUA (ARTIST) / JOE ORLANDO (EDITOR)
2


IF YOUR STEALTH WERE AS STRONG AS YOUR STENCH, SLY ONE, YOU'D YET BE IN ONE PIECE!
STILL, YOU SETTLED MY PONDERINGS WHETHER OR NOT TO ENTER THIS GODLESS HOLE-- I SUPPOSE YOU DESERVE SOME RECOMPENSE FOR YOUR EFFORTS!
INKEEPER! A FLAGON OF WINE-- AND A PLATE OF WHATEVER PASSES FOR MEAT IN THIS DEN OF THIEVES!
SOON...
MY, HANDSOME ONE, I MUST SAY YOU HAVE A TALENT FOR MAKING AN ENTRANCE!
AND PERHAPS, AFTER YOU'VE DINED, THERE ARE OTHER TALENTS YOU'D CARE TO SHARE WITH--
OH!
CLUMSY WENCH!
I-I'M SORRY, SIR! HERE, L-LET ME HELP YOU CLEAN--
NO! LEAVE THAT--
--ALONE.
GASP Y-YOUR HAND! LIKE... LIKE SOMETHING FROM THE PIT! A-A DEMON HAND!
3



FOR A MOMENT, THE COLD-EYED STRANGER HESITATES, WEIGHING THE ADVANTAGES OF FLIGHT AGAINST THE EMPTINESS IN HIS BELLY--
--AND THEN, CAUTION SUSPENDED BY HUNGER, TURNS BACK TO HIS PLATE...
--UNAWARE THAT ONE MAN'S MEAT--
--CAN SOMETIMES BECOME THAT SAME MAN'S POISON...
HE'S THE ONE, GIRL? YOU'RE SURE? 'CAUSE IF YOU'RE LYIN' TO OLD TARMAG--
OH, NO, GOOD MASTER, I SWEAR! H-HIS HAND! IT'S WEBBED--LIKE SOME HORRIBLE SERPENT!
WELL THEN, MY PRETTY, IN THAT CASE TOMORROW'S SUN SHOULD FIND YOUR MASTER A VERY RICH MAN! AND YON BARBARIAN--
--A VERY DEAD ONE!
DARKNESS FALLS, AS IS ITS HABIT, AND SOON...
HMPH. I'D WAGER CARRION-EATERS HAVE DINED BETTER THIS NIGHT THAN I! AND IN MORE CONGENIAL COMPANY AS WE--
SUDDENLY, THE DARKNESS IS FILLED WITH SHAPES--SHADOWS THAT LUNGE WITH TEETH OF STEEL...
?!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.
4



ONLY TO FIND THEIR INTENDED VICTIM WITH TEETH OF HIS OWN...
URNK!
GODS! HE'S QUICK AS A CAT, THIS OUTLANDER!
¡UNF!
AYE, BUT JARMAL'S CARCASS PULLS HIS SWORD FROM HIM! AND HE'LL NOT ESCAPE ME SO--
YOU TALK TOO MUCH, AXEMAN!
HUH?!
ALLOW ME TO CURE YOU OF THAT VULGAR HABIT!
KRAK
YOU JEST GLIBLY, LONG-HAIR! BUT WE'LL SEE HOW WELL YOUR MOUTH WORKS WHEN YOUR HEAD IS PARTED FROM YOUR--
TCHANG!
WHA-? Y-YOU KNOCKED AWAY MY SWORD-- LIKE IT WAS A FEATHER!
AYE, CUR, FOR I'VE NO LOVE FOR ASSASSIN'S BLADES--
--NOR FOR THE LOUTS WHO WIELD THEM!
SWATCH
UNNNNNNNNNN
5

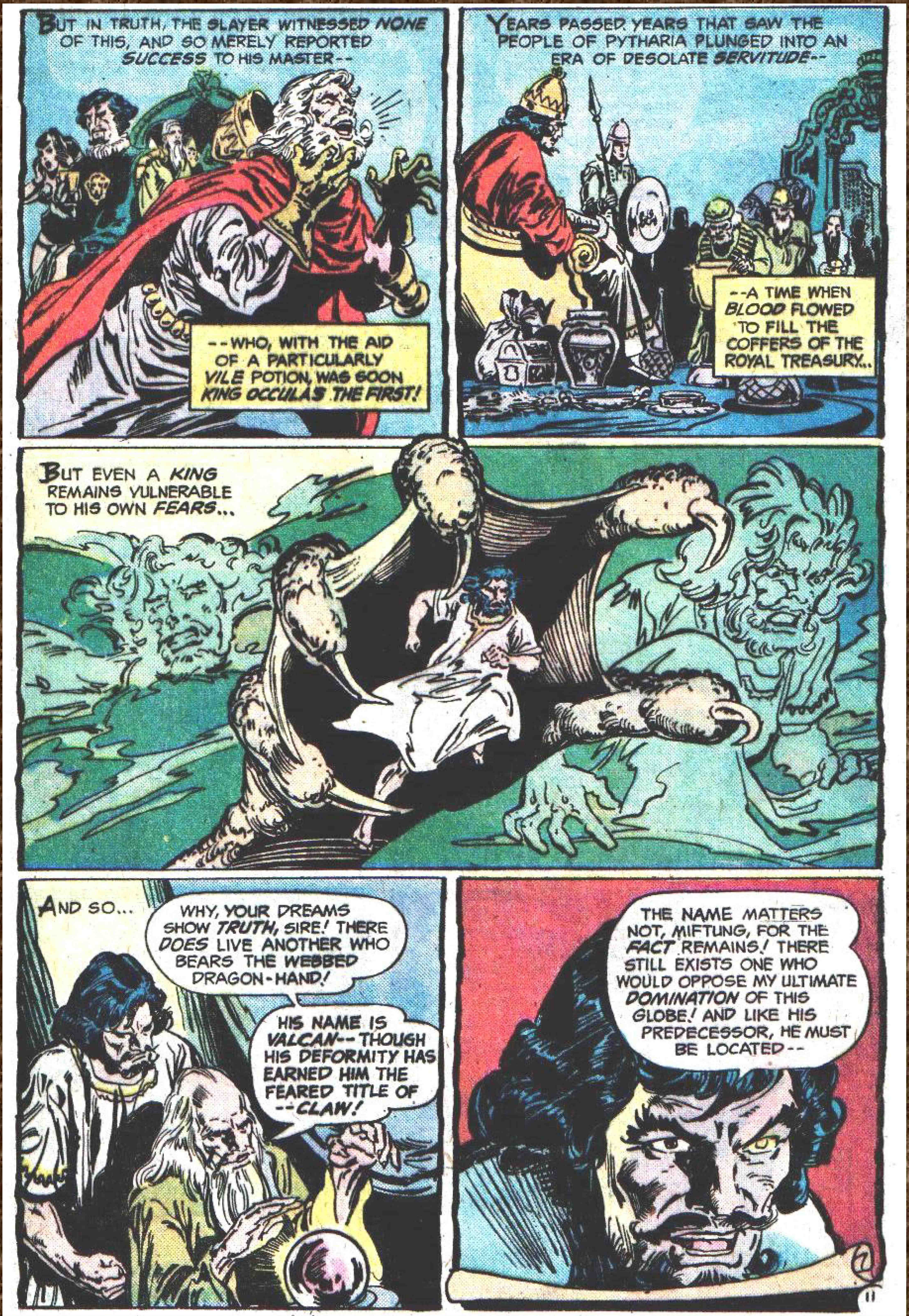

AND AS FOR YOU, FAT ONE, NEVER LET IT BE SAID THAT VALCAN IS UNMERCIFUL--FOR I SHALL ALLOW YOU TO LIVE!
THOUGH WITH ALTERATIONS THAT WILL MAKE YOU WISH FOR YEARS TO COME THAT I HADN'T!
BUT THEN...
YOU THERE! HOLD!
CITY GUARDS!
AYE, LUCK IS WITH YOU, FAT ONE! FOR I'VE NO DESIRE TO FACE A DOZEN MORE SWORDS THIS NIGHT!
CATCH HIM! H-HE'S A THIEF! A MURDERER!
DON'T WORRY, GOOD SIR! HE WON'T GET FAR!
WHEW! HE CAN'T GET FAR ENOUGH TO SUIT ME!
BUT PERHAPS THERE'S STILL A WAY TO TURN A PROFIT OUT OF ALL THIS--WITHOUT HAVING TO FACE THE SWORD OF SOME BULL-MAD BARBARIAN!
TIME PASSES, AS THE PORTLY INKEEPER'S HURRIED FOOTSTEPS TAKE HIM TO CASTLE DARKMORN, THE MIST-SHADOWED CITADEL WHERE DWELLS--
--OCCULAS OF THE YELLOW EYE, LORD RULER OF ALL PYTHARIA!
Y-YES, SIRE, I'M SURE IT WAS HIM! AND HE HAS THE DRAGON'S HAND, JUST AS YOU DESCRIBED!
6


A-AND THOUGH I KNOW YOU WANTED THE MAN HIMSELF, SIRE, ISN'T THIS INFORMATION WORTH... SOMETHING?
AYE, INKEEPER, YOU'VE DONE WELL. YOUR WORDS ARE VALUABLE INDEED --AS IS YOUR SILENCE!
OH, Y-YOU CAN TRUST ME, SIRE! I-I WON'T BREATHE A WORD OF OUR, UH, TRANSACTIONS!
OF THAT I'M SURE, TARMAG--
SNAP
CHK
--QUITE SURE!
YOU WERE WISE, O KING. THAT CHURL'S WAGGING TONGUE COULD HAVE PROVEN DANGEROUS!
AYE, MIFTUNG, I NEED NOT YOUR SORCERY TO TELL ME THAT!
AND AS FOR YOU, ZEDON, YOUR BLADE WAS USEFUL-- AS ALWAYS!
THANK YOU SIRE, I... TRY TO PLEASE!
LIKE A BEATEN DOG, SILENCE SINKS INTO THE HALL, SETTLING SOFTLY OVER THE PLAYERS: THREE GRINNING CONSPIRATORS--AND THE LEERING FACE OF DEATH...
...A SCENE MOST FAMILIAR TO THE EYES OF TIME, FOR IT HAS BEEN PLAYED BEFORE--
7


--IN A DAY WHEN KING WAS PRINCE-- AND NONE TOO HAPPY ABOUT IT...
PRINCE OCCULAS?! WHY, UH, WHAT BRINGS YOU TO MY--
YOU KNOW QUITE WELL WHY I'M HERE, MIFTUNG! I GROW IMPATIENT--
--AND SICK OF SERVING A KING WHOSE WEAKNESS DRIPS LIKE SYRUP FROM HIS EDICTS! YOU PROPHESIED THE THRONE FOR ME, SEER --AND I WOULD KNOW WHEN!
B-BUT, SIR PRINCE, SUCH THINGS TAKE TIME--!
BUT TIME IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY PRECIOUS FOR BOTH OF US, WIZARD-- IF I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR!
I-I'LL GET MY V-VIEWING CRYSTAL RIGHT AWAY, S-S-SIRE!
AND SOON...
I SEE IT NOW, GOOD PRINCE. IN ONE WEEK, THE THRONE SHALL BE YOURS!
BUT BEWARE, FOR THE CRYSTAL SHOWS ANOTHER OMEN AS WELL! A HAND--
--WEBBED LIKE A DRAGON'S PAW!
IT IS THE HAND OF JUSTICE, SIRE--AND THE ONLY POWER THAT CAN THREATEN YOUR RULE!
NO! I'VE WAITED TOO LONG FOR THIS! I'LL TOLERATE NO THREATS! THE OWNER OF THE DRAGON'S HAND MUST BE FOUND--
--AND ELIMINATED!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.


FOR A MAN OF SCRUPLES, SUCH A TASK MIGHT HAVE PROVEN DIFFICULT--BUT FOR OCCULAS OF THE YELLOW EYE...
ONLY -AGH- ONE... IN ALL... PYTHARIA -UNH- WITH SUCH... A HAND...
KREGAR -UNGH- OF KANON WOOD...
AND, AFTER A SHORT CONFERENCE WITH A TRUSTING KING...
KREGAR? PLOTTING TO ASSASSINATE ME? I FIND THAT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE, PRINCE OCCULAS! BUT, IF YOU SAY IT'S TRUE--
--HAVE HIM BROUGHT TO THE CASTLE! I'LL INVESTIGATE THIS MATTER MYSELF!
HOWEVER...
THERE ARE MANY INTERESTS INVOLVED HERE, ZEDON, AND YOURS WOULD BEST BE SERVED IF THIS KREGAR WERE NOT TO REACH THE CASTLE... ALIVE!
I UNDERSTAND, MILORD!
AND SO, A SHORT TIME LATER IN KANON WOOD...
TREASON?! BUT THE KING'S ALWAYS HAD MY LOYALTY--HE KNOWS THAT!
NEVERTHELESS, KREGAR, YOU STAND ACCUSED! WILL YOU COME PEACEFULLY?
AYE, I'VE NOTHING TO HIDE! I'LL COME!
A PITY, THAT! SINCE MY REPORT MUST STATE THAT YOU--
--DIED WHILE TRYING TO ESCAPE!
KREGAR!
9


AND, OF COURSE, MILADY, I CAN'T LEAVE ANYONE ALIVE TO DISPUTE THAT REPORT, NOW CAN I? HA HA HA!
THE STILLNESS OF THE CLEARING CRACKS TO THE SHRILL OF CRUEL LAUGHTER--
--A SOUND THAT FADES ONLY WITH THE HOOFBEATS OF THE SLAYER'S STEED-- HOOFBEATS LEAVING BEHIND A STILLNESS NO LONGER COMPLETE--
--FOR NOW ANOTHER SOUND CAN BE HEARD--
--THE LONESOME WHINE OF AN INFANT LEFT NEAR A STREAM AGAINST THE HEAT OF A SUMMER'S DAY--
--AN INFANT WITH A MOST... DISTINCTIVE HAND...
AND HAD THE MURDEROUS SOLDIER HEARD THAT CRY, AND STOPPED TO INVESTIGATE-- HE MIGHT HAVE WITNESSED YET ANOTHER UNUSUAL APPEARANCE...
HUSH, CHILD --FEAR NOT!
YOUR TIME IS NOT YET COME! FOR THERE ARE TASKS AWAITING--
--TASKS THAT ONLY YOU MAY PERFORM...
CONTINUED ON 5TH PAGE FOLLOWING.
10


But in truth, the slayer witnessed none of this, and so merely reported success to his master--
--who, with the aid of a particularly vile potion, was soon King Occulas the First!
Years passed, years that saw the people of Pytharia plunged into an era of desolate servitude--
--a time when blood flowed to fill the coffers of the royal treasury..
But even a king remains vulnerable to his own fears...
And so...
Why, your dreams show truth, sire! There does live another who bears the webbed dragon-hand!
His name is Valcan-- though his deformity has earned him the feared title of --Claw!
The name matters not, Miftung, for the fact remains! There still exists one who would oppose my ultimate domination of this globe! And like his predecessor, he must be located--
11


--AND DESTROYED!
AYE, SIRE, BUT YOU'LL BE NEEDING MORE THAN MORTAL STRENGTH TO SLAY THIS ONE! SUCH STRENGTH AS I CAN PROVIDE WITH--
--THE EYE OF KANN! AN ANCIENT TALISMAN THAT WHEN COMBINED WITH THE PROPER WORDS, WIELDS GREAT MYSTIC POWER!
ATTEND, ZEDON, WHILE I INSTRUCT YOU IN ITS USE!
AND LATER, AS THE GUARDSMAN LEAVES WITH THE ARCANE GEM...
DO I DETECT A HINT OF SELF-SATISFACTION IN YOUR MANNER, WIZARD?
YOU'RE MOST OBSERVANT, MILORD, 'TIS TRUE. FOR YOUNG ZEDON WAS BECOMING OVERLY AMBITIOUS, AND 'TWOULD NOT BE LONG ERE HE DESIRED THE THRONE ITSELF!
BUT IF HE USES THAT ANCIENT JEWEL PROPERLY--WE MAY WELL RID OURSELVES OF TWO THREATS WITH ONE STONE! HEH HEH!
SHORTLY, IN A SHADOWED ICHARIAN ALLEYWAY...
THEY'RE PERSISTENT DOGS, THESE GUARDSMEN! IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE--?
WHO--?
EASY WITH THAT SWORD, HANDSOME ONE! HOW CAN I GUIDE YOU TO SAFETY IF YOU SPLIT MY GIZZARD, EH?
NOW HURRY, BEFORE THE GUARDS RETURN!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.
12


BUT... WHY SHOULD YOU HELP ME?
MY MASTER WAS A CRUEL MAN. HE WENT TO SLAY YOU --AND DID NOT RETURN!
FOR THAT, I OWE YOU MUCH MORE THAN GRATITUDE!
BUT TELL ME WHY WOULD YOUR LIFE BE WORTH SOMETHING TO A MAN LIKE TARMAG?
I KNOW NOT, GIRL. IN MATTER OF TRUTH, I KNOW LITTLE OF MY OWN EXISTENCE SAVE FOR THE EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW DAYS!
WHAT?
AYE, MY PAST IS A STRANGER TO ME! I KNOW ONLY THAT I HAVE A GNAWING SENSE OF FATE--A FEELING THAT I AM TO PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN THE FUTURE OF THIS WORLD!
BUT WHAT ROLE, OR WHY I AM TO PLAY IT, REMAINS A MYSTERY! THUS IS MY FUTURE AS VAGUE AS MY PAST!
NOT SO YOUR IMMEDIATE FUTURE, OUTLANDER, FOR WE HAVE ARRIVED!
BY THE SEVEN BEARDS OF SOTH! WHAT MANNER OF DEVIL'S DEN IS THIS?
IT WAS A TEMPLE! THE FOLLOWERS OF KANN WORSHIPPED HERE AGES AGO--UNTIL THEY ABANDONED THEIR RELIGION!
SOME SAY BECAUSE THEY BECAME AFRAID OF THEIR OWN GOD!
13


ONLY RUMORS REMAIN AS TO WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT DEITY, BUT--
--BUT YOU SHOULDN'T WORRY YOUR SHAGGY HEAD ABOUT IT, BARBARIAN--
--FOR YOU'LL SOON BE TOO DEAD TO CARE!
A TRAP! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN NOT TO TRUST A PRETTY FACE!
COME THEN, ASSASSINS, AND I'LL TAKE A DOZEN OF YOU TO HELL WITH ME!
OH, I'VE NO INTENTIONS OF LOSING GOOD MEN TO YOUR SWORD, LONG-HAIR! NOT WHEN I CAN LET A GOD DO MY SLAYING FOR ME! BECAUSE, YOU SEE--
--KANN LIVES!
AYE, THOUGH THE FEARFUL KANNITES BANISHED HIM TO A NETHERWORLD, THIS JEWEL WILL FOCUS ENOUGH ENERGY TO BRING HIM BACK!
AND AFTER ALL THESE EONS, EVEN A GOD MUST--HUNGER!
DARK WORDS ARE SPOKEN--AND A CHILL WHINE LANCES THE THICK NIGHT AIR--
--A THROBBING CRY THAT SWELLS TO A MIND-SPLITTING SHRIEK AS THE PULSING HELL-JEWEL GLOWS--
--SPREADING THE TEMPLE IN A BLANKET OF PALLID, UNHEALTHY LIGHT--
--A FITTING HALO TO HERALD THE DAMNABLE RESURRECTION OF--
14


--KANN THE ALL-CONSUMING!
GODS! THE BEAST'S SCREAM MAKES NO SOUND --YET IT TEARS AT MY VERY BRAIN!
FLEE, GIRL! WHILE I STILL HAVE... REASON LEFT... TO FIGHT THE THING!
BUT...
VALCAN!
YOU MAY HAVE... BETRAYED ME, GIRL... BUT NO ONE DESERVES ...SUCH AN OBSCENE FATE... AS--
15


KLANK
MY SWORD! THE MONSTER SNAPS THE BLADE... LIKE KINDLING!
FLAMES OF SILENT AGONY TEAR AT CLAW'S MIND EVEN AS THE WRITHING SLIME DRAWS HIM CLOSER...
WHICH RAISES THE QUESTION" IS IT THE LAST REMNANTS OF REASON OR SOMETHING MORE--THAT GUIDES A CRIMSON-GLOVED HAND ACROSS THE DUST-MOTTLED FLOOR--
--THAT BIDS METAL-CLAD FINGERS TO GRASP A JAGGED SUPPORT ROD FROM THE TEMPLE'S SHATTERED SKYLIGHT--
--TO RAISE THAT MAKESHIFT SPEAR AND WITH A SURENESS INCONSISTENT WITH THE CIRCUMSTANCES--
--TO BRING IT DOWN AGAIN!
TCHACK
BUT THE TORN AND BLEEDING BARBARIAN PONDERS NONE OF THESE THINGS. HE IS MERELY CONTENT TO LIVE--
OORRRRGH
--WITH THE AWESOME KNOWLEDGE THAT--
--EVEN A GOD--
--CAN DIE!
SPLOOSH!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.
16



SOTH! EVEN AS A CORPSE, THE THING'S ENOUGH TO TURN ONE'S--
VALCAN L-LOOK!
AYE! THE POOR DEVIL SAID THE JEWEL REQUIRED ENERGY! ONLY HE MUST NEVER HAVE REALIZED THAT ENERGY WOULD BE DRAINED--
--FROM HIS OWN SOUL!
WELL, AT LEAST HE WON'T BE NEEDING THIS ANY LONGER. AND I'VE AN UNEASY FEELING I WILL!
AND...WILL YOU TAKE ME WITH YOU, HANDSOME ONE?
WHY? SO YOU CAN BETRAY ME AGAIN?
OH, B-BUT I ONLY HELPED THE GUARDS UNDER THREAT OF DEATH! I SWEAR! AND ANYWAY, YOU'LL FIND I HAVE CERTAIN CHARMS TO MAKE A LONG JOURNEY MORE... COMFORTABLE!
RIGHT NOW, GIRL, YOUR CHARMS MEAN LESS TO ME THAN A GOOD HORSE! BUT STILL, I WOULDN'T LEAVE THE WRETCHED-EST HAG TO THE "TENDER MERCIES" OF ICHARIAN SOLDIERS--
--SO COME! MY DESTINY AWAITS!
AND I ALREADY BEGIN TO ENVY THOSE WHO'VE FOUND THEIRS!
17


EPILOGUE: SOME DAYS LATER...
YOU'D BEST FILL YOUR FLASK, GIRL. WE'VE A LONG WAY TO TRAVEL ERE NIGHTFALL.
HMMM. AND WHY NOT STAY HERE, HANDSOME ONE?
I'M SURE WE COULD FIND SOME WAY TO PASS THE TIME!
THIS IS NEITHER THE TIME NOR THE PLACE FOR --EH?
SO! I NO SOONER BEGIN TO TRUST YOU THAN YOU TRY TO WHITTLE ME BEHIND MY BACK! WHY, GIRL?
OW! P-PLEASE! Y-YOU'RE HURTING ME!
AND I'LL DO WORSE THAN THAT IF I DON'T GET SOME ANSWERS--AND QUICKLY!
THERE! AGH O-ON THAT TREE!
WHAT--? OH, I SEE. I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THERE'D BE A PRICE ON YOUR LOYALTY!
WAIT! Y-YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME HERE ALONE!
YOU'LL HAVE COMPANY SOON ENOUGH, GIRL! THERE'LL BE JACKALS ABOUT COME SUNSET-- AND I'M SURE YOU'LL FEEL QUITE AT HOME WITH THEM!
AND, ANYWAY, I'VE OTHER THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT... NOW...
REWARD 10,000 DREKNARS FOR THE HEAD AND RIGHT HAND OF VULCAN THE CLAW
AN EARLY EVENING WIND CURLS THE SAND, MOANING THE LEGEND OF A MAN WITHOUT A PAST--AN OUTLAW IN HIS OWN HOMELAND-- A MAN OF DESTINY CALLED-- CLAW!
THE END
18
NEXT ISSUE ON SALE DURING THE FOURTH WEEK IN APRIL



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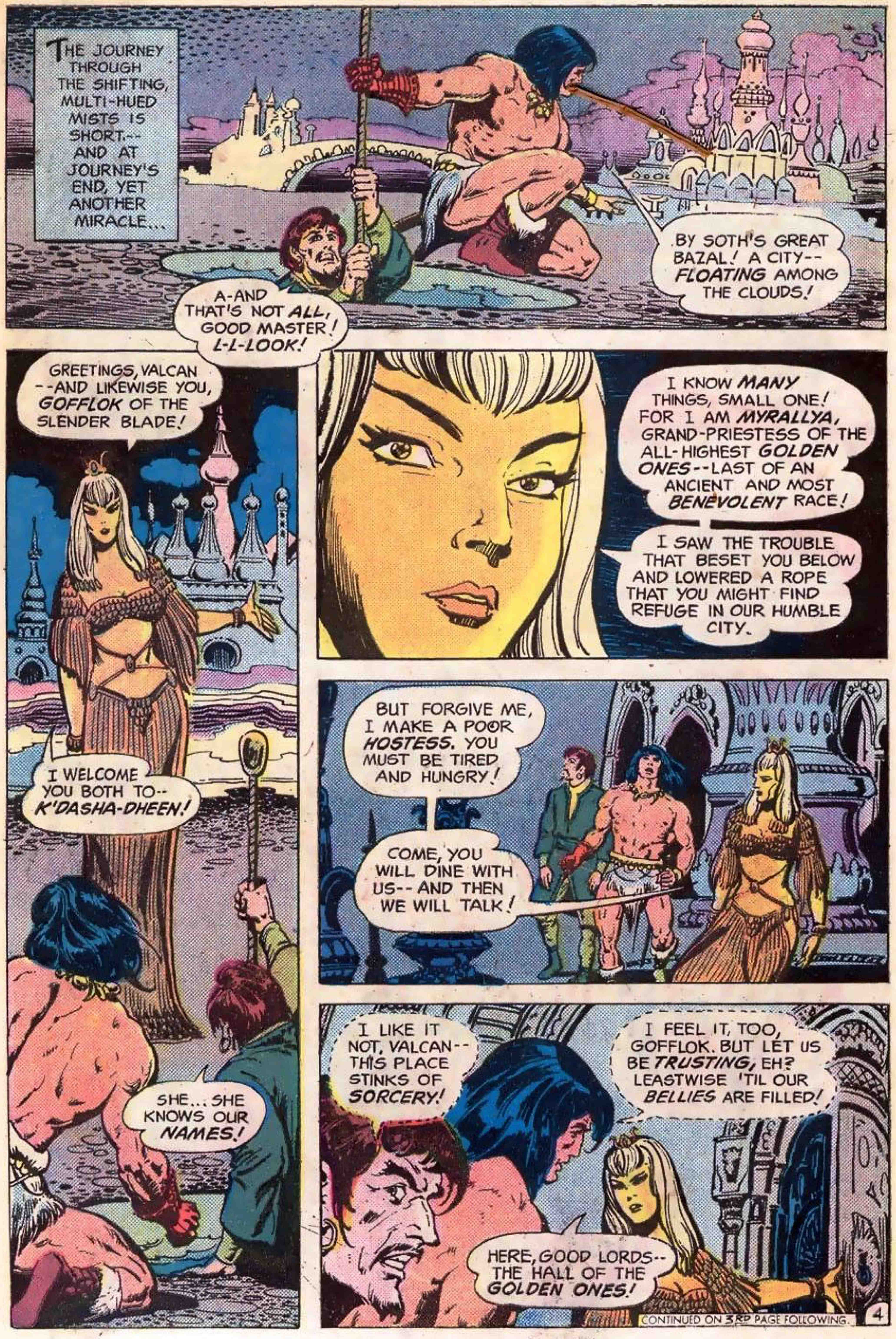
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BUT WITH A BLUR OF CRIMSON MOTION, THE "SHADOW" SUDDENLY FACES THE DISCOMFORTING REALIZATION THAT THE ONLY DEATH THE STARS WILL WITNESS THIS NIGHT--
--MAY WELL BE HIS OWN!
IF ALL THE ASSASSINS HEREABOUTS ARE AS STUMBLE-FOOTED AS YOU, WEASEL, A TRAVELER HAS MORE TO FEAR FROM BOREDOM!
UNF!
STILL, I WOULD KNOW WHY YOUR CLUMSY BLADE SINGLES OUT MY THROAT!
SPEAK SWIFTLY, CHURL--AND PERHAPS I'LL LEAVE YOU YOUR TONGUE!
A-A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY, GOOD SIR!
Y-YOU SEE, KING OCCULAS OFFERS 10,000 DREKNARS FOR THE DEATH OF AN OUTLANDER WEARING A CRIMSON GAUNTLET!
O-OF COURSE, I REALIZE NOW THAT CAN'T BE YOU, FAIR MASTER! I-I'M SURE M-MANY MEN WEAR A SINGLE SCARLET GLOVE! I-I HEAR IT'S ALL THE RAGE IN--
SILENCE, WEASEL! YOU LIE AS BADLY AS--EH?
GRRROARRR
2



GODS! WH-WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE ARE THOSE?
I KNOW NOT, WEASEL-- BUT IT SEEMS OUR LITTLE DISCUSSION WILL HAVE TO WAIT!
RIGHT NOW I'D BEST GIVE THESE HELL-BEASTS A TASTE OF GOOD PYTHARIAN STEEL BEFORE--
WHA-? THE BLADE GLANCES OFF THEIR HIDE-- LIKE 'TWAS MADE OF STONE!
I-IN THAT CASE, GOOD MASTER, M-MIGHT I SUGGEST A STRATEGIC RETREAT?
AYE, YOUR SUGGESTION HAS MERIT, WEASEL-- FOR WE'D BE IN SAD SHAPE, INDEED, WERE WE TO LET THESE BEASTS--
--SURROUND US...
BUT SALVATION COMES IN MANY FORMS IN A WORLD BEYOND TIME, AS...
A ROPE! DROPPING FROM THAT CLOUD! QUICKLY, SLY ONE, WHILE WE'VE STILL LEGS TO CLIMB!
B-BUT, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S AT THE TOP!
PERHAPS NOT. BUT WE KNOW ONLY TOO WELL WHAT WAITS AT THE BOTTOM!
I, UH, BEGIN TO SEE THE WISDOM IN YOUR WORDS, GOOD MASTER!
3



THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE SHIFTING, MULTI-HUED MISTS IS SHORT.-- AND AT JOURNEY'S END, YET ANOTHER MIRACLE...
BY SOTH'S GREAT BAZAL! A CITY-- FLOATING AMONG THE CLOUDS!
A-AND THAT'S NOT ALL, GOOD MASTER! L-L-LOOK!
GREETINGS, VALCAN --AND LIKEWISE YOU, GOFFLOK OF THE SLENDER BLADE!
I WELCOME YOU BOTH TO-- K'DASHA-DHEEN!
SHE... SHE KNOWS OUR NAMES!
I KNOW MANY THINGS, SMALL ONE! FOR I AM MYRALLYA, GRAND-PRIESTESS OF THE ALL-HIGHEST GOLDEN ONES--LAST OF AN ANCIENT AND MOST BENEVOLENT RACE!
I SAW THE TROUBLE THAT BESET YOU BELOW AND LOWERED A ROPE THAT YOU MIGHT FIND REFUGE IN OUR HUMBLE CITY.
BUT FORGIVE ME, I MAKE A POOR HOSTESS. YOU MUST BE TIRED AND HUNGRY!
COME, YOU WILL DINE WITH US-- AND THEN WE WILL TALK!
I LIKE IT NOT, VALCAN-- THIS PLACE STINKS OF SORCERY!
I FEEL IT, TOO, GOFFLOK. BUT LET US BE TRUSTING, EH? LEASTWISE 'TIL OUR BELLIES ARE FILLED!
HERE, GOOD LORDS-- THE HALL OF THE GOLDEN ONES!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.
4


DOORS OF NOT-QUITE-WOOD SLIDE SILENTLY OPEN, BATHING THE TWO RAGGED DOWN-WORLDERS IN THE DELICATE SCENTS OF GOOD FOOD, THE CONVIVIAL DRONE OF MEAL-TIME CHATTER--
EAT--WHILE I RELATE A BIT OF OUR CITY'S HISTORY THAT I'M SURE YOU'LL FIND MOST... ENTERTAINING.
--AND THE TINGLING AIR OF A SUBTLE, THOUGH UNMISTAKABLE, TENSION...
YOU SEE, GOOD LORDS, K'DASHA-DHEEN DOES NOT IN TRUTH FLOAT--BUT HANGS SUSPENDED BETWEEN TWO SEPARATE PLANES OF REALITY! A FEAT HAVING BEEN ACCOMPLISHED AGES AGO BY A SINCE-LOST ENCHANTMENT--
--A GLAMOUR THAT ALSO RENDERS US GOLDEN ONES IMMORTAL!
HOWEVER, THE ENCHANTMENT MUST BE RENEWED EACH 100 ANNUMS ELSE THE CONFLICTING FORCES OF THE OPPOSING DIMENSIONS PULL OUR CITY ASUNDER!
IN THE PAST, THIS RENEWAL WAS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF A GOD!
BUT, SINCE GODS ARE SOMEWHAT SCARCE THESE DAYS--
"--I'M AFRAID WE'RE FORCED TO MAKE DO WITH WHAT IS AVAILABLE!"
AYE, GIRL, I BEGIN TO GET THE POINT!
5


THOUGH I TRUST YOU WON'T THINK ME UNGRACIOUS IF I DON'T CHOOSE TO ADORN YOUR GOLDEN ALTAR--
--WILLINGLY!
KERASH!
SO, WEASEL, WE FIGHT ON THE SAME SIDE THIS TIME, EH?
I JUST HOPE YOUR SWORDSMANSHIP IS BETTER WHEN THE FOE YOU FACE ISN'T SLEEPING!
WORRY NOT ON THAT, GOOD MASTER!
YOU'LL FIND MY SKILL WITH A BLADE IMPROVES CONSIDERABLY--
--WHEN IT'S MY LIFE THAT'S AT STA--
GOFFLOK!
6

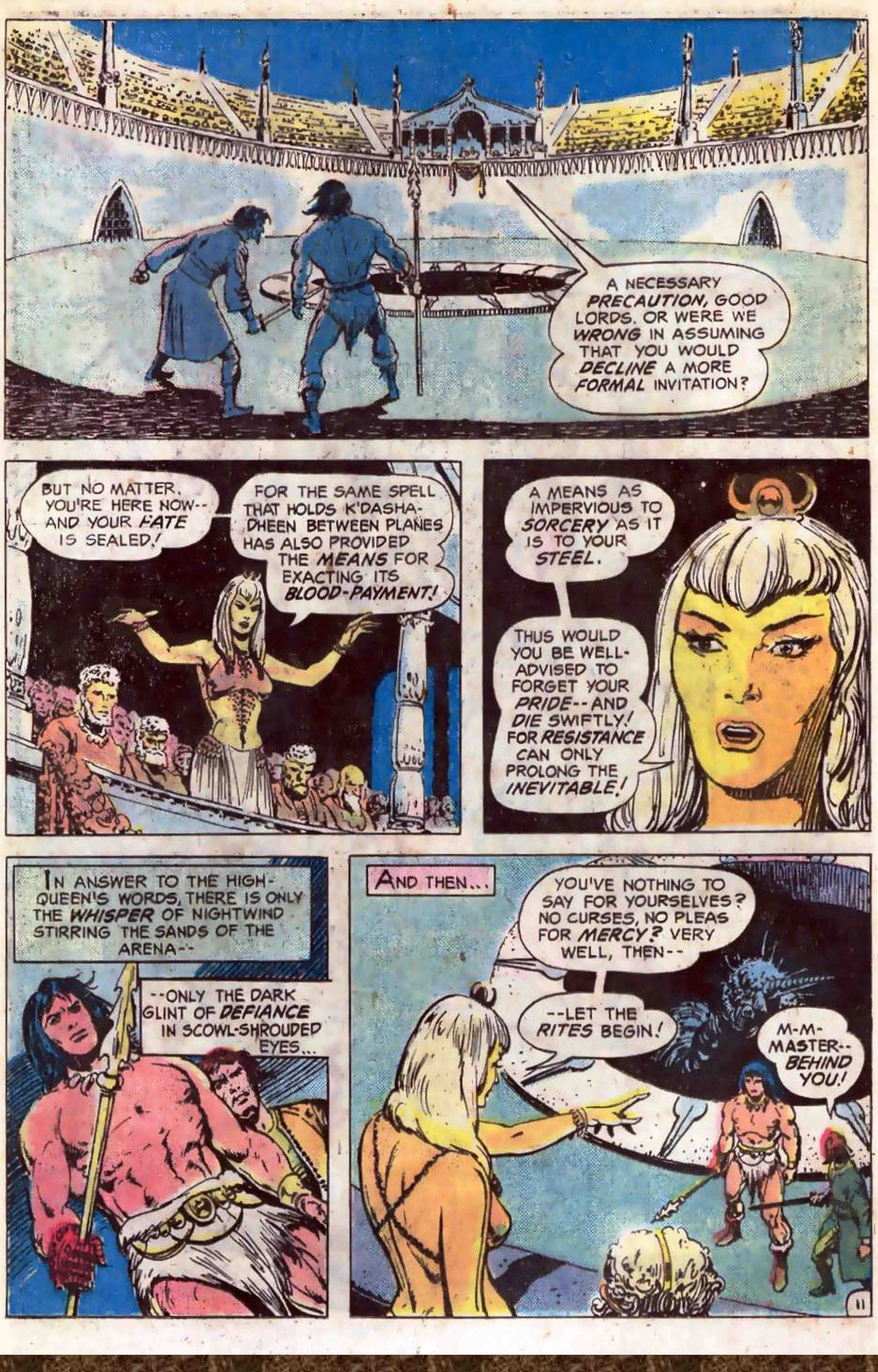

AGGH!
SHHHUCK
MY THANKS, FRIEND VALCAN. YOU'RE A GOOD MAN TO HAVE AT ONE'S BACK!
PERHAPS. BUT UNLESS THE TIDE OF BATTLE TURNS SOON, THE ONLY THINGS AT OUR BACKS WILL BE THESE GUARDS-MEN'S SWORDS!
TRY THE DOOR, WEASEL--WHILE I GIVE OUR FRIENDS SOMETHING ELSE TO OCCUPY THEIR MINDS!
KWUMPH
OUR FORTUNE IMPROVES, VALCAN! THE DOOR IS UNBOLTED!
THEN HURRY THROUGH--WHILE WE'VE STILL TIME TO--
--ESCAPE...
7


BUT EVEN A HARD-THEWED BARBARIAN MUST BOW, ALBEIT GRUMBLINGLY, TO IMPOSSIBLE ODDS. AND SOON...
SO, WE WERE DUPED. THOSE HELL-HOUNDS ARE THE GOLDEN ONES' PETS--
--USED TO TRICK US INTO ENTERING THIS THRICE-DAMNED CITY IN THE FIRST PLACE!
BUT WHY? WHY WOULD A PEOPLE USED TO SACRIFICING GODS GO TO SUCH LENGTHS TO GAIN YOU AS A SUBSTITUTE?
WHAT HAVE YOU TO OFFER THESE CLOUD-DWELLERS?
I KNOW NOT, GOFFLOK!
PERHAPS I'M A PAST ENEMY--OR SOME FUTURE THREAT. IN MATTER OF TRUTH, I KNOW NOT WHAT I AM!
WHAT--?
AYE, I BECAME AWARE ONLY WEEKS AGO WHILE WANDERING THE DESERT. MY PAST WAS A BLANK, AND MY ONLY POSSESSIONS A GOOD BROADSWORD, THIS CRIMSON GAUNTLET I WEAR--
--AND A GNAWING SENSE OF UNQUIET DESTINY!
AND...THAT DESTINY IS WHY THESE PEOPLE WOULD SEE YOU DEAD?
AGAIN, I KNOW NOT. NOR HAVE I ANY DESIRE TO TARRY LONG ENOUGH TO FIND OUT!
COME, GOFFLOK! SINCE OUR HOSTS HAVE PROVIDED NO DOORS OR WINDOWS IN THEIR "GUEST QUARTERS"--
--I FEEL IT ONLY FITTING THAT WE MAKE SOME!
KERWAM
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8

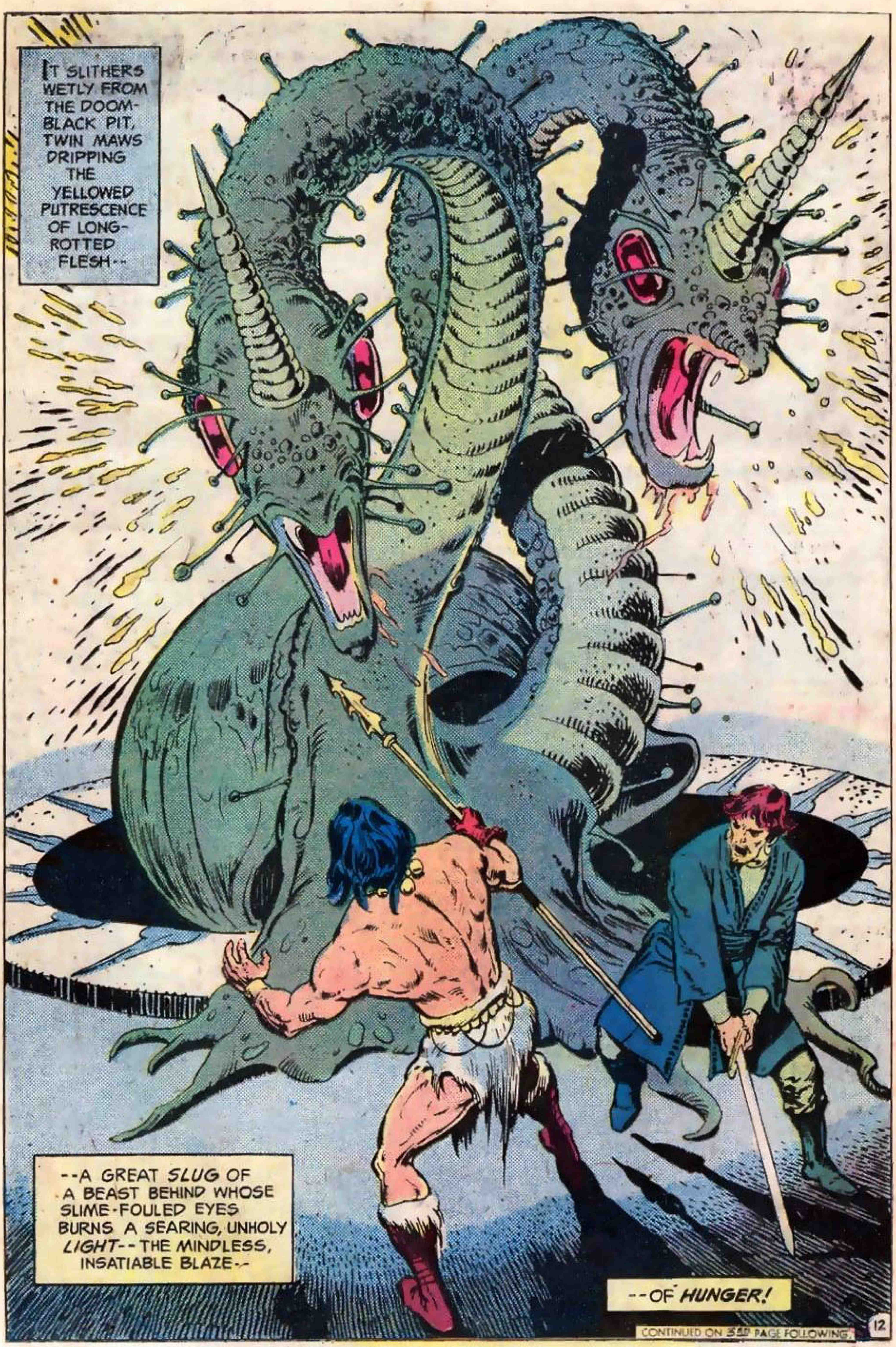

KERWAM
KER-
-WHAM!
NOW, WEASEL, WITH ANY LUCK WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO--
BEST SAVE YOUR WORDS OF LUCK, GOOD MASTER!
9



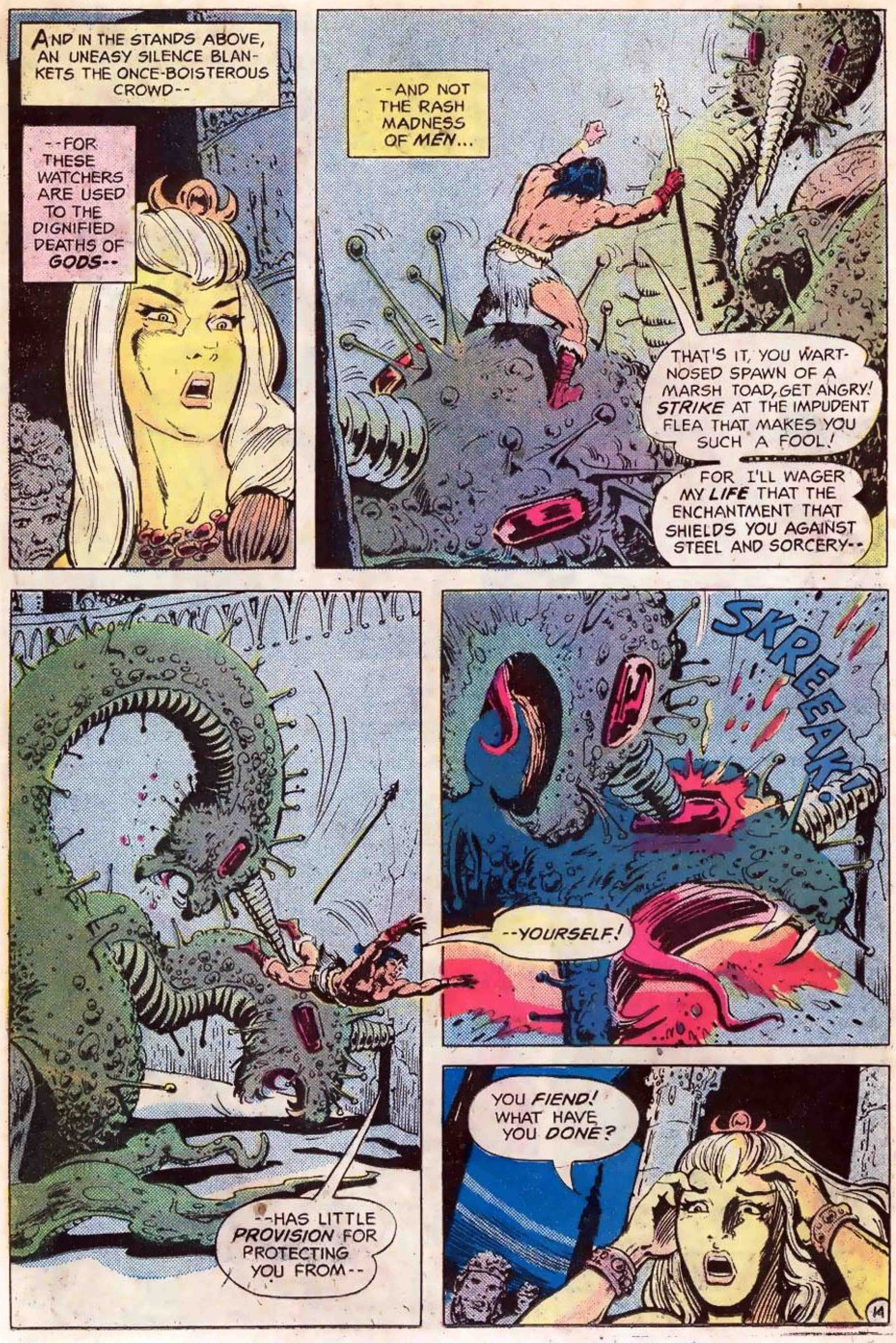
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A NECESSARY PRECAUTION, GOOD LORDS. OR WERE WE WRONG IN ASSUMING THAT YOU WOULD DECLINE A MORE FORMAL INVITATION?
BUT NO MATTER. YOU'RE HERE NOW-- AND YOUR FATE IS SEALED!
FOR THE SAME SPELL THAT HOLDS K'DASHA-DHEEN BETWEEN PLANES HAS ALSO PROVIDED THE MEANS FOR EXACTING ITS BLOOD-PAYMENT!
A MEANS AS IMPERVIOUS TO SORCERY AS IT IS TO YOUR STEEL.
THUS WOULD YOU BE WELL-ADVISED TO FORGET YOUR PRIDE--AND DIE SWIFTLY! FOR RESISTANCE CAN ONLY PROLONG THE INEVITABLE!
IN ANSWER TO THE HIGH-QUEEN'S WORDS, THERE IS ONLY THE WHISPER OF NIGHTWIND STIRRING THE SANDS OF THE ARENA--
--ONLY THE DARK GLINT OF DEFIANCE IN SCOWL-SHROUDED EYES...
AND THEN...
YOU'VE NOTHING TO SAY FOR YOURSELVES? NO CURSES, NO PLEAS FOR MERCY? VERY WELL, THEN--
--LET THE RITES BEGIN!
M-M-MASTER-- BEHIND YOU!
11


IT SLITHERS WETLY FROM THE DOOM-BLACK PIT, TWIN MAWS DRIPPING THE YELLOWED PUTRESCENCE OF LONG-ROTTED FLESH--
--A GREAT *SLUG* OF A BEAST BEHIND WHOSE SLIME-FOULED EYES BURNS A SEARING, UNHOLY *LIGHT*-- THE MINDLESS, INSATIABLE BLAZE--
--OF ***HUNGER!***
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.
12


AND THEN, WITH A SWIFTNESS THAT DENIES ITS PONDEROUS BULK...
EEAGH!
SO, DEMON-FILTH, YOU WOULD SHOW YOUR COURAGE BY SWATTING GNATS, EH?
COME, THEN, AND SEE HOW YOU FARE AGAINST A MAN!
VAGUELY, A PLAN BEGINS TO FORM IN VALCAN'S MIND --A PLAN AS DESPERATE AS THE SITUATION...
...AS CAUTIOUSLY, THE SHELL-THING INCHES FORWARD, FILMY EYES SURVEYING ITS NOW-STILL PREY...
UNTIL FINALLY, SATISFIED OF AN EASY KILL, THE SERPENTINE NECK COILS BACK, THE BONE-HARD SPIKE ANGLES DOWNWARD--
--AND THE SLIME-BEAST DIVES--
--ONLY TO FIND A TARGET SOMEWHAT MORE SOLID THAN ANTICIPATED...
HO, MONSTER, YOU'RE FAST-- BUT 'TWOULD SEEM THAT VALCAN IS FASTER!
13



AND IN THE STANDS ABOVE, AN UNEASY SILENCE BLANKETS THE ONCE-BOISTEROUS CROWD--
--FOR THESE WATCHERS ARE USED TO THE DIGNIFIED DEATHS OF GODS--
--AND NOT THE RASH MADNESS OF MEN...
THAT'S IT, YOU WART-NOSED SPAWN OF A MARSH TOAD, GET ANGRY! STRIKE AT THE IMPUDENT FLEA THAT MAKES YOU SUCH A FOOL!
FOR I'LL WAGER MY LIFE THAT THE ENCHANTMENT THAT SHIELDS YOU AGAINST STEEL AND SORCERY--
--HAS LITTLE PROVISION FOR PROTECTING YOU FROM--
SKREEAK!
--YOURSELF!
YOU FIEND! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
14

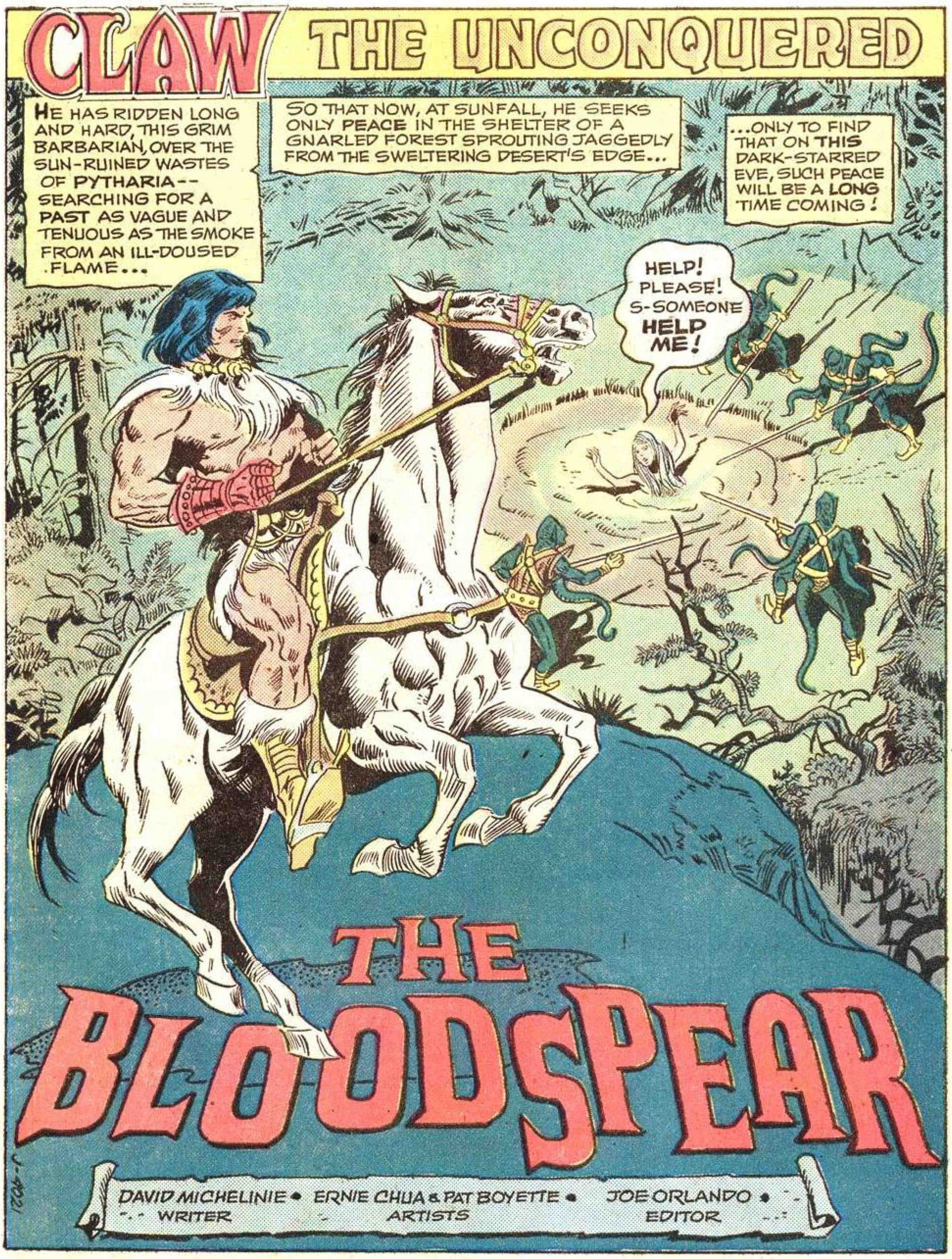

APPARENTLY... THAT WHICH GODS... HAD NOT THE STOMACH FOR...
BUT MYRALLYA NO LONGER HEARS THE GRIM BARBARIAN'S NEAR-WHISPERED WORDS--
--FOR NOW SHE FACES A MORE PERSONAL TERROR--
--THE IRREFUTABLE FACT THAT TIME, THOUGH PATIENT, MUST EVENTUALLY COLLECT ITS DUES FROM ALL--
--AND THAT FINAL PRICE CAN BE A FEARFUL ONE, INDEED...
AND THEN THE NIGHT SHATTERS WITH SCREAMS-- AN AGONY THAT WAILS AMONG THE ONCE-HIGH RULERS AS MORE AND MORE GOLDEN FLESH RUNS GREY--
--ASSUMING THE CONSISTENCY OF CURDLED CREAM AS IT DISSIPATES INTO TIME'S WAITING MAW...
15



WHILE NEARBY, FREED FROM THE CONTROL OF THEIR ANCIENT MASTERS, OTHER JAWS FILL WITH LESS ETHEREAL FARE...
EYAAAAAAA
G-GOOD MASTER! S-SURELY YOU WOULDN'T LEAVE POOR GOFFLOK BEHIND?
THE THOUGHT TEMPTS ME, WEASEL! BUT COME--
--EVEN THE LIKES OF YOU DESERVE A KINDER FATE THAN WAITS HERE!
CLUMSILY, THE MISMATCHED PAIR STUMBLES FROM THE GLEAMING CITADEL, OUT INTO THE WELCOMING DARK OF THE CLOUDSCAPE...
WHERE SOON...
THE ROPE! B-BUT MY LEG! H-HOW WILL I--
FEAR NOT, SLY ONE! FOR WHERE THERE'S A WARRIOR--
--THERE'S A WAY!
ONCE MORE, STRONG HANDS GRIP THE DANGLING SKY-ROPE...
...AS SLOWLY, THE DISTANCE BETWEEN HEAVENS AND EARTH IS TRAVERSED...
C-CAREFUL, MASTER! I-IT'S LONG WAY DOWN!
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16

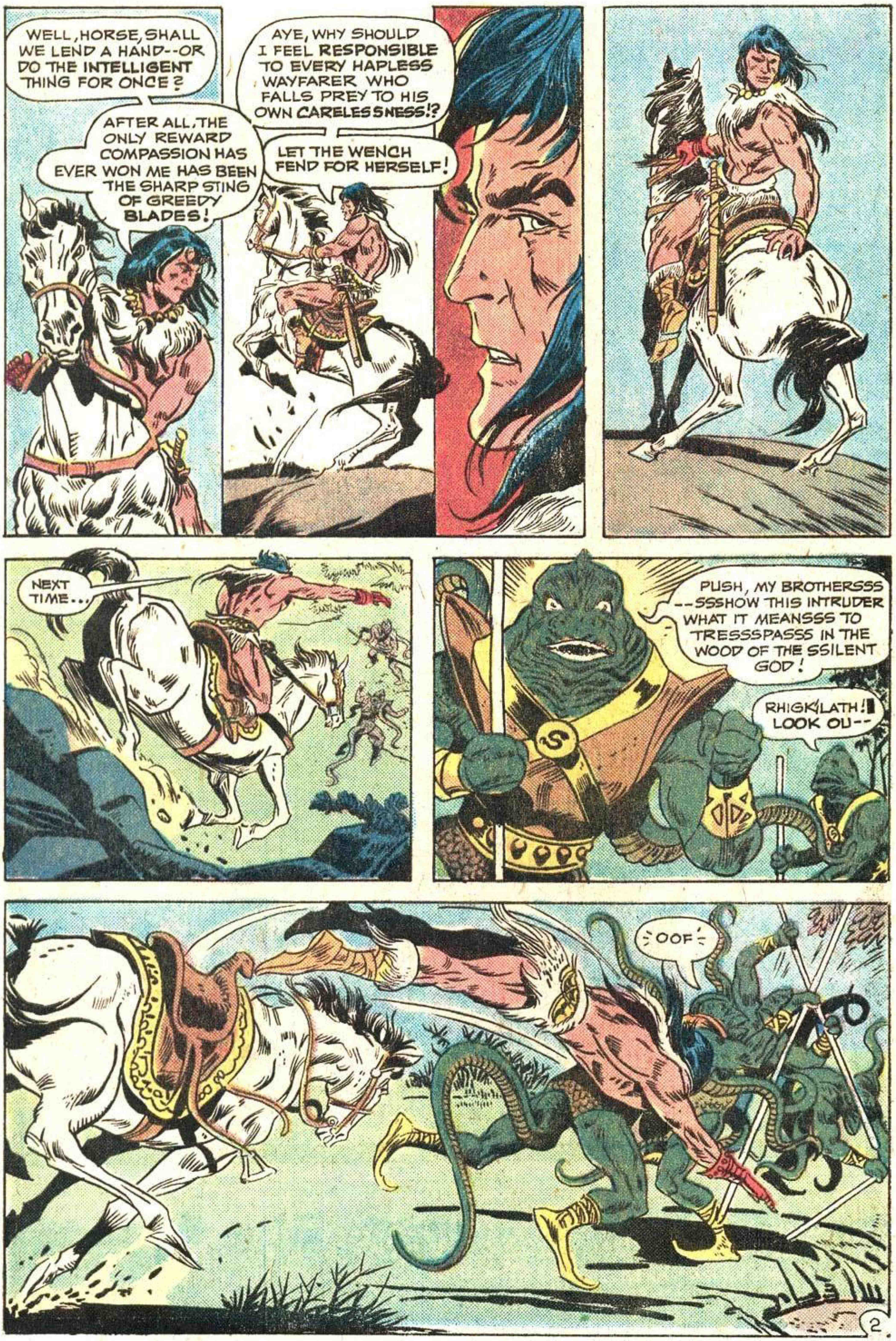

UNTIL FINALLY...
SOLID EARTH! I COULD ALMOST KISS IT!
BEST CURB YOUR STRANGE DESIRES, WEASEL! WE'VE NOT THE TIME TO INDULGE THEM!
MY HORSE SHOULD STILL BE TETHERED BY THE STREAM. AND THOUGH SHE'LL NO DOUBT BALK AT YOUR ADDED BURDEN, I--
BUT THE SENTENCE GOES UNFINISHED, AS A TREMBLING ROAR SOUNDS FROM THE HOVERING CLOUDS--
--A RUMBLING BELLOW THAT GROWS TO A RASPING SHRIEK--
--AS THE LONG-DENIED FORCES OF UNTOLD ELDRITCH DIMENSIONS PULL AT GLITTERING TOWERS, TEAR AT JEWELED BATTLEMENTS--
SHHOOMPH
--AND THE TIMELESS CITY OF K'DASHA-DHEEN--
--DIES!
GODS! EVEN THE BLADE DISSOLVES IN MY VERY HAND! THE OLD ONES' ENCHANTMENT WAS THOROUGH INDEED!
AYE, GOOD MASTER!
I'M QUITE FOND OF TYING UP LOOSE ENDS MYSELF!
AND SINCE OUR DANGEROUS ADVENTURE IS NOW PASSED--
17


--THERE'S STILL ONE BIT OF UNFINISHED BUSINESS I'D LIKE TO--
BUT WITH ALMOST INHUMAN SPEED, A CRIMSON-GLOVED HAND ARCS UPWARD--
--AND JUST AS SWIFTLY, PLUNGES DOWN AGAIN...
UNNNNNNN
AND THE QUESTION LIES MOOT AS TO WHETHER SURPRISE WELLS GREATER IN THE EYES OF THE DYING ASSASSIN--
--OR IN THE STEEL-COLD ORBS OF WHO HE HAS SLAIN HIM...
I--I DON'T UNDERSTAND. I DIDN'T EVEN SEE THE ATTACK COMING! IT'S AS IF MY GAUNTLET MOVED TO PROTECT ME--OF ITS OWN ACCORD!
ALMOST AS THOUGH, FOR A MOMENT, THE HAND INSIDE THIS METAL SHELL WAS NO LONGER ENTIRELY--
--MY OWN!
WORDS FADE, AND SILENCE BLANKETS THE OASIS--WRAPPING ONE MORE PUZZLE ABOUT A MAN WHOSE VERY EXISTENCE IS MYSTERY--
--A MAN SEEKING A PAST EVEN AS HE FLEES HIS FUTURE--A WANDERING ENIGMA OF A MAN CALLED... CLAW.
18
NEXT ISSUE ON SALE DURING THE LAST WEEK IN JUNE
The END



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WELL, HORSE, SHALL WE LEND A HAND--OR DO THE INTELLIGENT THING FOR ONCE?
AFTER ALL, THE ONLY REWARD COMPASSION HAS EVER WON ME HAS BEEN THE SHARP STING OF GREEDY BLADES!
AYE, WHY SHOULD I FEEL RESPONSIBLE TO EVERY HAPLESS WAYFARER WHO FALLS PREY TO HIS OWN CARELESSNESS!?
LET THE WENCH FEND FOR HERSELF!
NEXT TIME...
PUSH, MY BROTHERSSS --SSSHOW THIS INTRUDER WHAT IT MEANSSS TO TRESSSPASSS IN THE WOOD OF THE SSILENT GOD!
RHIGK'LATH! LOOK OU--
OOF
2


LIKE A HUMAN SCYTHE, THE FRENZIED BAR-BARIAN CARVES A SWATH THROUGH THE THRONG OF WOULD-BE ASSASSINS--
--A SWATH OF BLOOD AND PULSING OFFAL..
HISSS SSSWORD. MY BROTHERSS! GET HISSS SSSWORD! WITHOUT IT, HISSS FURY ISSS EMPTY!
LIKE PULPY, CARESSING FINGERS, RIBBONLIKE TENTACLES SLINK OUTWARDS--
--COIL ABOUT A FLASHING, CRIMSON GAUNTLET--
--AND PULL--
--REVEALING A--SCALY, FUR-TUFTED HORROR THAT ONLY THE KINDEST WOULD CALL A HAND...
SSSO, WE FIGHT A CRIPPLE, EH? THEN WITHOUT YOUR SSSTEEL YOU SSSHOULD PROVE A FEEBLE FOE, INDEED!
JUST KEEP THINKING THAT, SLIT-MOUTH--
--ALL THE WAY TO HELL!
SSSKRAAAA
3

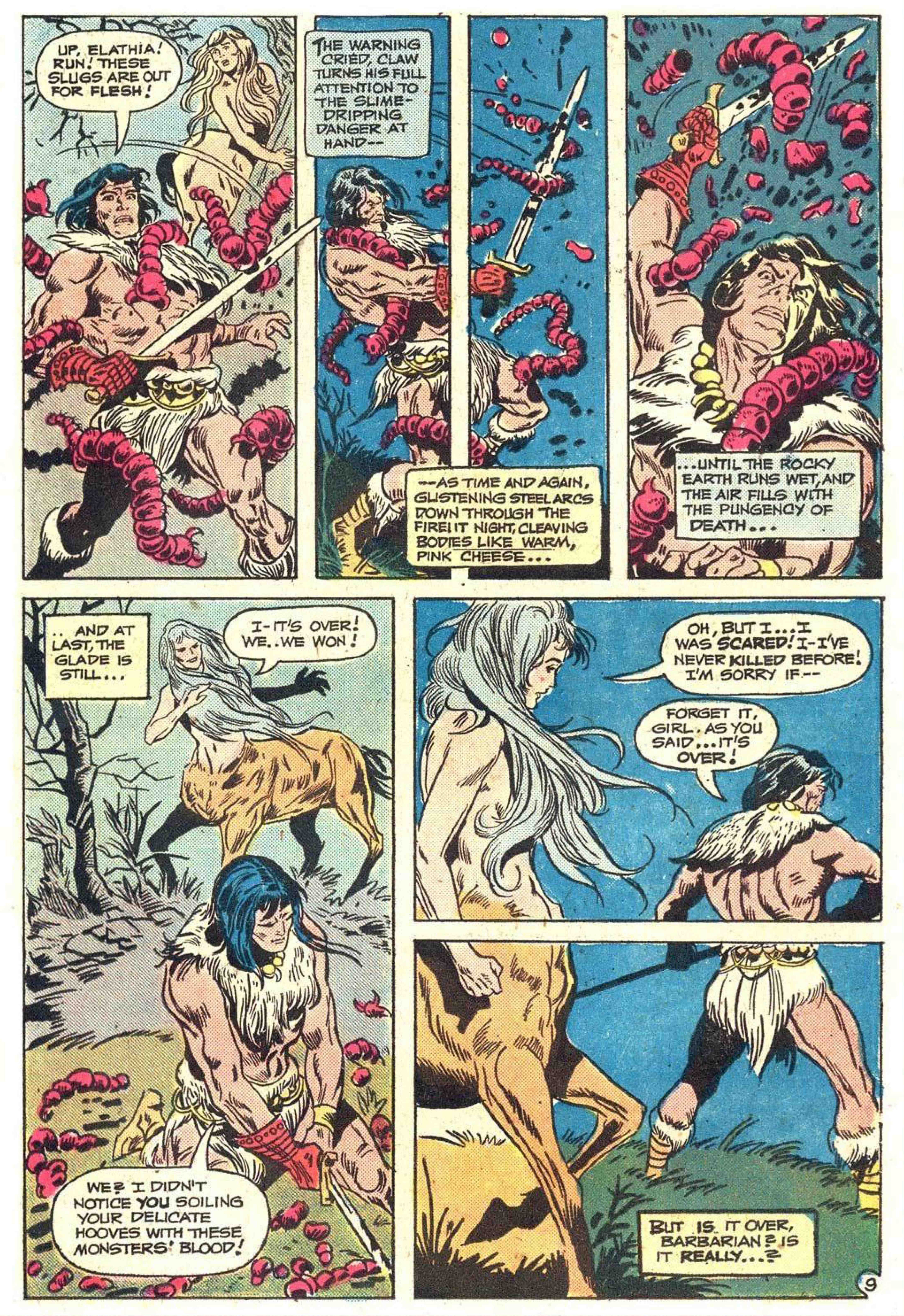

ONCE MORE THE BATTLE IS JOINED--
--BUT THIS TIME THE ATTACKERS ARE FAR LESS CONFIDENT--
--FOR THEY REMAIN ONLY TOO AWARE THAT THEIR LEADER, THE MIGHTIEST AMONG THEM--
--LIES SPRAWLED NEARBY IN A PUDDLE OF HIS OWN GORE--
--AND THAT THE MAN WHO LAID HIM OPEN SEEMS EQUALLY DETERMINED TO DO THE SAME TO THEM ALL...
IT IS A THOUGHT TO BREAK EVEN THE STRONGEST OF WILLS...
HO! THEY FLEE! METHINKS THERE'S A BIT OF THE FOWL IN THESE LIZARD MEN!
PLEASE! H-HELP!
TH-THE MIRE DRAWS ME DOWN F-FARTHER EACH MOMENT!
I'M WELL AWARE OF THE PROBLEM, GIRL! BUT I'LL WAGER THESE VINES SHOULD PROVIDE AN ADEQUATE SOLUTION!
HERE, MAKE THEM FAST ABOUT YOU!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.
4


THEN HORSE AND RIDER STRAIN--AS SLOWLY, WETLY, THE TREMBLING GIRL BEGINS TO PULL FREE OF THE CLUTCHING BOG...
UNTIL AT LAST...
I--I'M FREE! HOW CAN I EVER THANK YOU?
BEST SAVE YOUR GRATITUDE FOR WHEN WE'VE REACHED SOME OTHER PART OF THE FOREST. THOSE WEASEL-FACED SERPENTS ARE LIKE TO RETURN WITH REINFORCEMENTS ERE LONG.
SO WE'D BEST HURRY MY HORSE ISN'T USED TO AN EXTRA RIDER!
OH, I DON'T THINK THAT WILL BE MUCH OF A PROBLEM...
WHAT DO YOU MEA--
SOTH!
WHAT'S THE MATTER, WARRIOR? YOU ACT LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN A CENTAURESS BEFORE!
IN TRUTH, GIRL-- I NEVER HAVE!
5

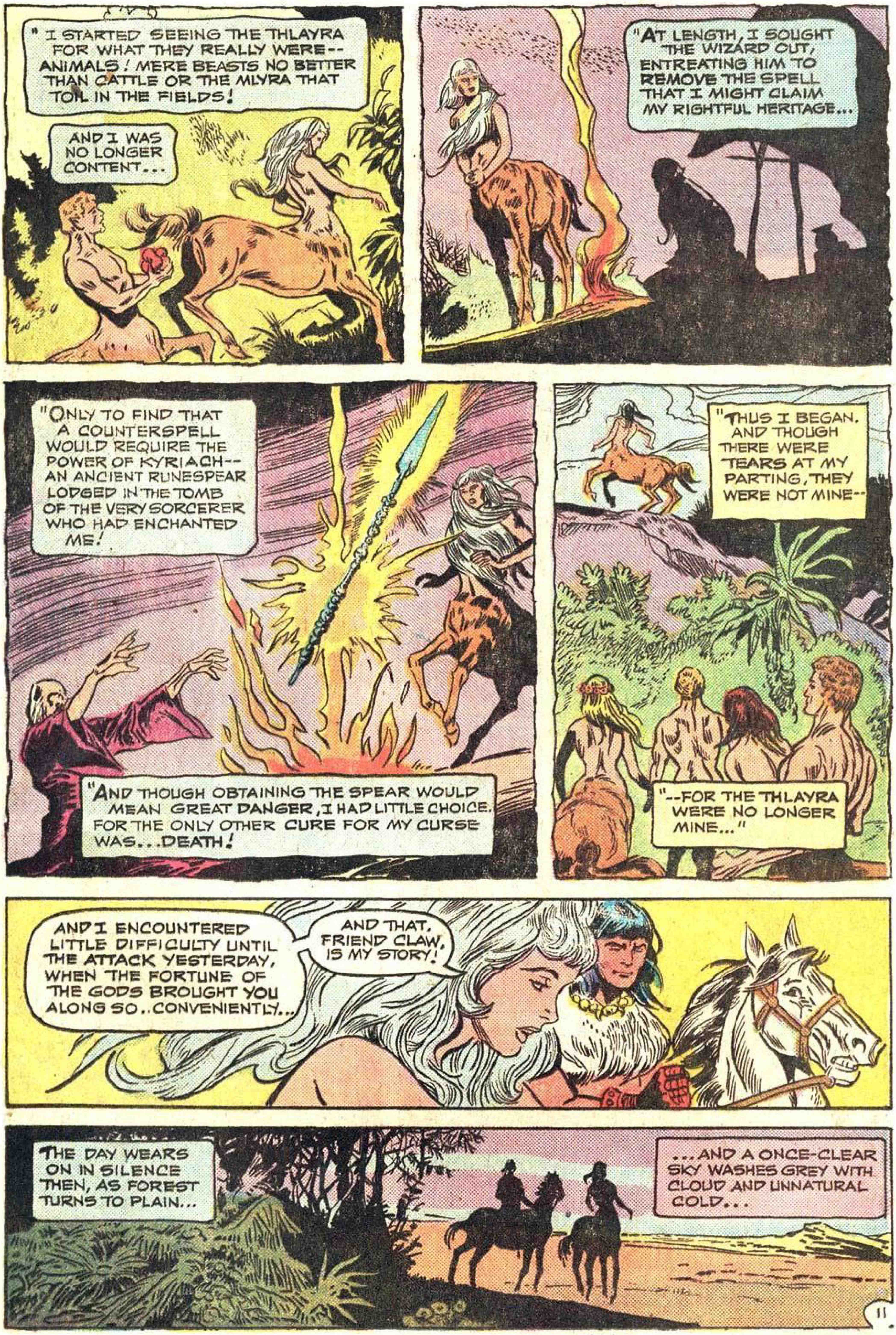

WELL, YOU'LL BE SEEING MUCH MORE OF ME IF THAT SCARLET GLOVE MARKS YOU FOR THE MAN I THINK IT DOES. BECAUSE I'VE A PROPOSITION FOR ONE CALLED... CLAW!
AYE, THAT'S ME. THOUGH I HADN'T THOUGHT MY NAME KNOWN HEREABOUTS!
NEVERTHELESS, I'LL HEAR YOUR OFFER--
--AFTER WE'VE QUIT THIS SNAKE-STENCHED BOG!
AND AS THE SOUND OF GALLOPING HOOVES FILLS THE MOON-SHADOWED WOOD...
I AM ELATHIA, A SEEKER AFTER FORTUNE! I GO TO THE WALL OF WEEPING MISTS TO PILLAGE THE TOMB OF A LONG-DEAD SORCERER..
BUT IF LEGEND BE TRUE, THOSE BEASTS THAT ATTACKED ME ARE BUT ONE OF THE HIDEOUS PERILS THAT CLUTTER THE WAY!
THUS WOULD I OFFER YOU HALF MY PLUNDER TO LEND YOUR SWORD TO MY QUEST!
HMPH! I'VE LITTLE NEED FOR GOLD--AND EVEN LESS FOR SORCERY!
AH, BUT THERE ARE OTHER BOUNTIES TO BE HAD--MAGICKS, POWERS...
...KNOWLEDGE!
KNOWLEDGE: THE WORD STICKS LIKE A THORN IN CLAW'S MIND--FOR THERE IS NOTHING HE COVETS MORE...
6

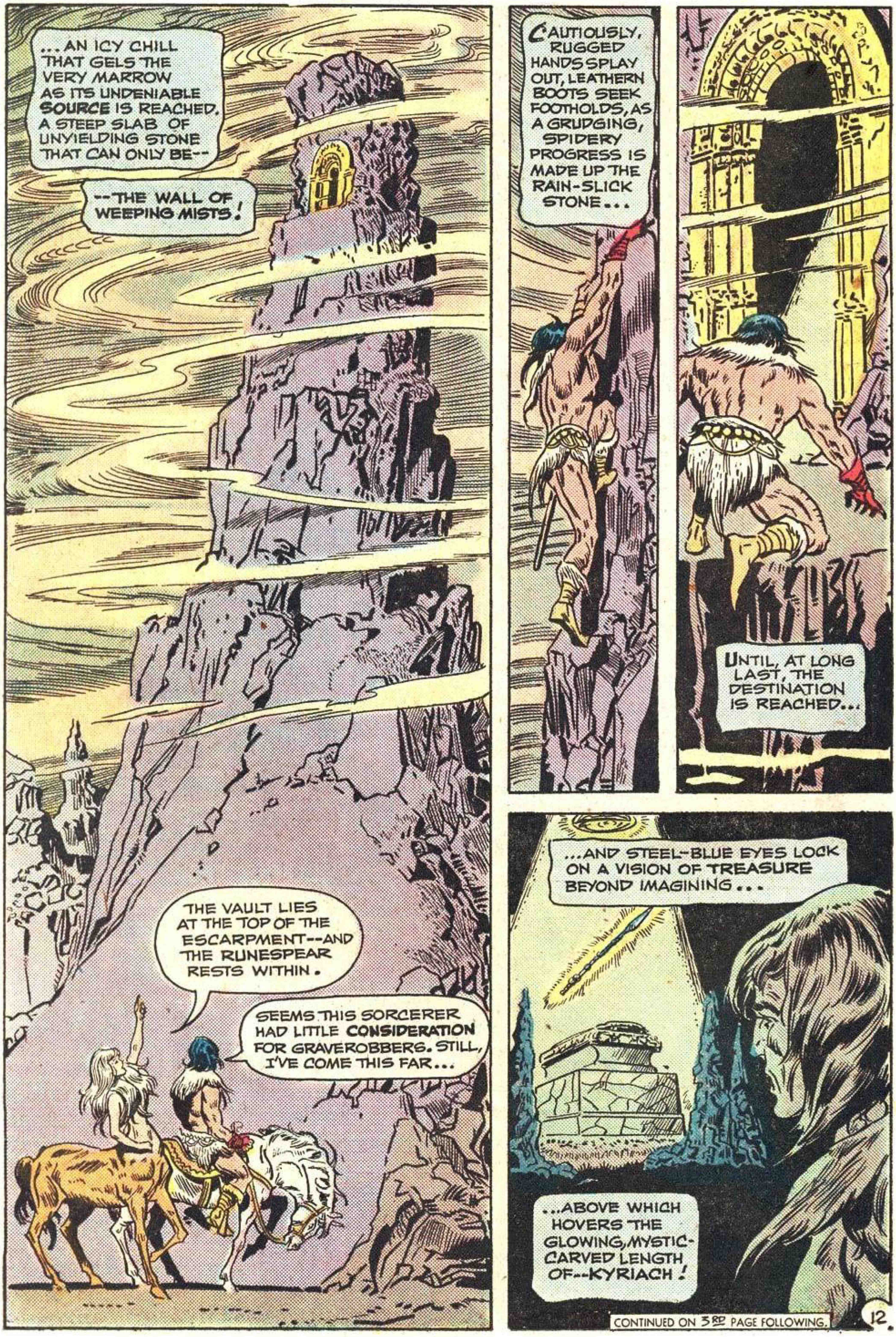

KNOWLEDGE TO EXPLAIN HIS SINGLE CHILDHOOD MEMORY, THAT OF AN INFANT ORPHANED BY TREACHERY-- AND KEPT FROM DEATH BY THE GENTLE HAND OF AN UNKNOWN SAVIOR...
KNOWLEDGE TO FILL THE VOID STRETCHING BETWEEN THAT MEMORY AND THE REBIRTH OF AWARENESS JUST SHORT WEEKS BEFORE--
REW
10,000 DREKNARS FOR THE HEAD AND RIGHT HAND OF CLAW
--A STORMY RESURRECTION MARKED BY A RESTLESS SENSE OF DESTINY-- AND THE UNJUST BRAND OF AN OUTLAW...
SUCH EMPTINESS TORMENTS THE VERY SOUL-- AND LEAVES CAUTION SHRIEKING TO DEAF EARS...
VERY WELL, GIRL-- YOU'VE HIRED A SWORD!
THUS IS THE CELESTIAL DIE CAST...
...WHILE SOME LEAGUES AWAY, AT BROODING CASTLE DARKMORN, TWO UNSEEN WATCHERS GROW SINISTER SMILES AT THE RESULTS OF THAT ROLL...
CONGRATULATIONS, MIFTUNG! YOUR LATEST PROJECT PROVES MOST INTERESTING!
THANK YOU, KING OCCULAS! I'M RATHER PROUD OF IT MYSELF!
AS WELL YOU SHOULD BE, WIZARD! THIS UPSTART BARBARIAN IS A FORMIDABLE ADVERSARY--
--AND HIS DEATH WILL HONOR US BOTH!
7.

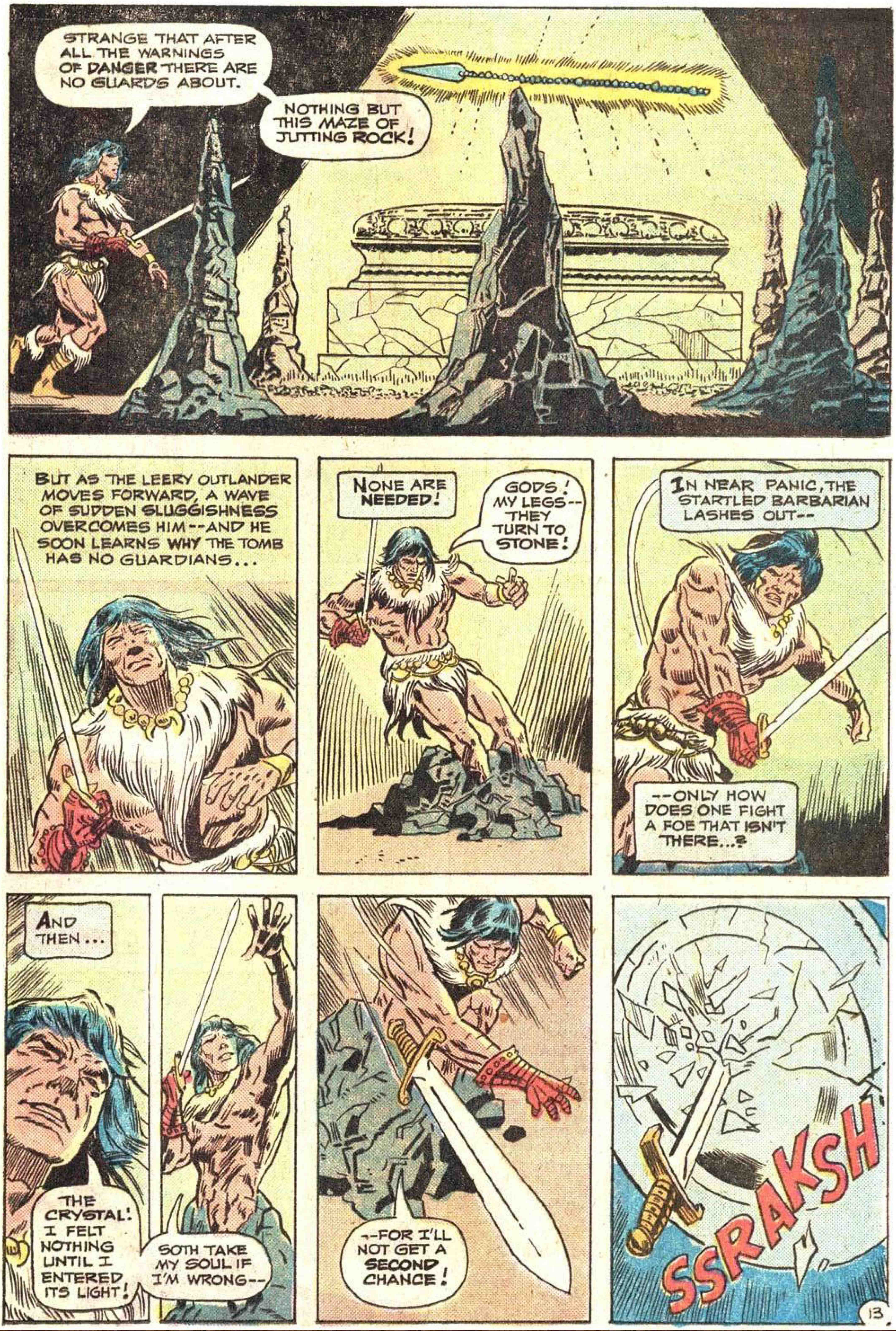

THE NIGHT GROWS LONG, AND THE TRAIL EVEN LONGER...UNTIL AT LENGTH EVEN A HARDENED OUTLANDER MUST TAKE RELUCTANT PAUSE. A CAMP IS MADE...
...AND SOON, RESTIVE SLEEP DRAPES TWO TIME-WEARY FORMS...
...AN UNSUSPECTING PAIR WHO HAVE YET TO REALIZE--
--THAT IN THE WOOD OF THE SILENT GOD--
--SUCH SLUMBER IS APT TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY--
--NIGHTMARE!
SOTH BE DAMNED! WHAT MANNER OF HELLSPAWN ARE THESE?
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.
8


UP, ELATHIA! RUN! THESE SLUGS ARE OUT FOR FLESH!
THE WARNING CRIED, CLAW TURNS HIS FULL ATTENTION TO THE SLIME-DRIPPING DANGER AT HAND--
--AS TIME AND AGAIN, GLISTENING STEEL ARCS DOWN THROUGH THE FIRELIT NIGHT, CLEAVING BODIES LIKE WARM, PINK CHEESE...
...UNTIL THE ROCKY EARTH RUNS WET, AND THE AIR FILLS WITH THE PUNGENCY OF DEATH...
.. AND AT LAST, THE GLADE IS STILL...
I-IT'S OVER! WE..WE WON!
WE? I DIDN'T NOTICE YOU SOILING YOUR DELICATE HOOVES WITH THESE MONSTERS' BLOOD!
OH, BUT I...I WAS SCARED! I-I'VE NEVER KILLED BEFORE! I'M SORRY IF--
FORGET IT, GIRL. AS YOU SAID...IT'S OVER!
BUT IS IT OVER, BARBARIAN? IS IT REALLY...?
9


DAWN BREAKS, AND AS THE JOURNEY IS RESUMED...
TELL ME, ELATHIA, WHAT IS YOUR REAL PURPOSE IN SEEKING THIS CONJURER'S CRYPT?
WHY, UH, WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I MEAN, 'TIS ODD TO UNDERGO SUCH DANGERS WHEN MERE GOLD IS EASILY OBTAINED WITH A DAGGER IN ANY SHADOWED ALLEYWAY!
AH, YOU'RE TOO CLEVER, WARRIOR, BUT I SUPPOSE YOU HAVE EARNED THE TRUTH...
"YOU SEE, UNTIL SOME DAYS AGO I WAS PART OF A HERD OF THLAYRA GRAZING IN THE CENTRAL GRASSLANDS OF SCARTORIS.
"WE WERE A NOBLE, GENTLE PEOPLE, CONTENT WITH OUR LOT...
"BUT THEN, ONE DAY, A WANDERING WIZARD CAME AMONG US. HE SEEMED WISE AND PERCEPTIVE, AND I WAS FLATTERED WHEN HE TOOK SPECIAL INTEREST IN ME...
"..UNTIL HE DREW ME ASIDE AND REVEALED THAT I WAS NOT ONE OF THE THLAYRA AT ALL--
"--THAT A SPELL HAD BEEN CAST UPON ME AT BIRTH CAUSING ME TO CHANGE INTO THIS FORM--
"--THAT I WAS, IN REALITY, A HUMAN!
"AT FIRST I LAUGHED AT THE IDEA."
"BUT WITH TIME, I BEGAN FEELING DIFFERENTLY...
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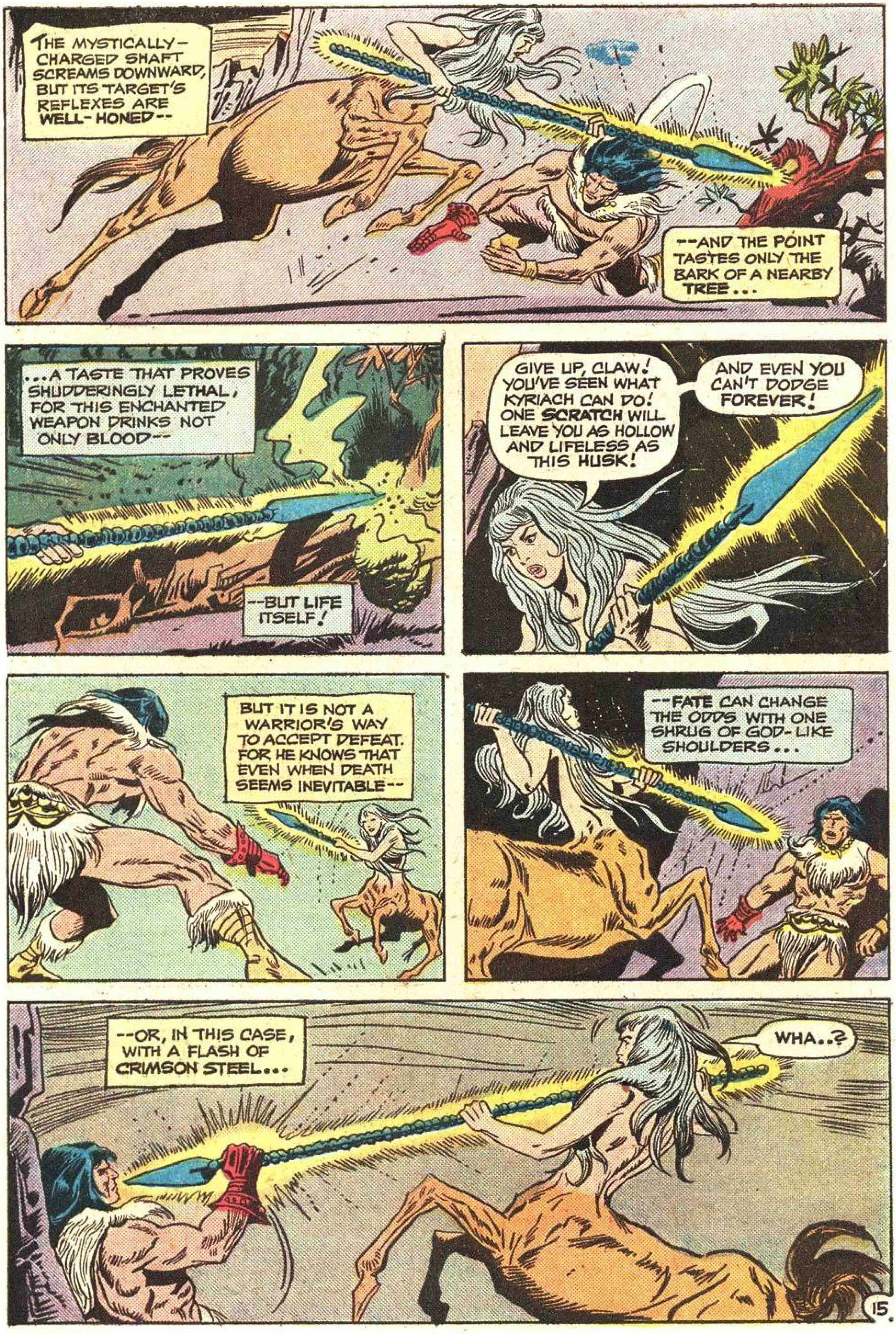

"I STARTED SEEING THE THLAYRA FOR WHAT THEY REALLY WERE-- ANIMALS! MERE BEASTS NO BETTER THAN CATTLE OR THE MLYRA THAT TOIL IN THE FIELDS!
AND I WAS NO LONGER CONTENT...
"AT LENGTH, I SOUGHT THE WIZARD OUT, ENTREATING HIM TO REMOVE THE SPELL THAT I MIGHT CLAIM MY RIGHTFUL HERITAGE...
"ONLY TO FIND THAT A COUNTERSPELL WOULD REQUIRE THE POWER OF KYRIACH-- AN ANCIENT RUNESPEAR LODGED IN THE TOMB OF THE VERY SORCERER WHO HAD ENCHANTED ME!
"AND THOUGH OBTAINING THE SPEAR WOULD MEAN GREAT DANGER, I HAD LITTLE CHOICE. FOR THE ONLY OTHER CURE FOR MY CURSE WAS...DEATH!
"THUS I BEGAN. AND THOUGH THERE WERE TEARS AT MY PARTING, THEY WERE NOT MINE--
"--FOR THE THLAYRA WERE NO LONGER MINE..."
AND I ENCOUNTERED LITTLE DIFFICULTY UNTIL THE ATTACK YESTERDAY, WHEN THE FORTUNE OF THE GODS BROUGHT YOU ALONG SO..CONVENIENTLY...
AND THAT, FRIEND CLAW, IS MY STORY!
THE DAY WEARS ON IN SILENCE THEN, AS FOREST TURNS TO PLAIN...
...AND A ONCE-CLEAR SKY WASHES GREY WITH CLOUD AND UNNATURAL COLD...
11


...AN ICY CHILL THAT GELS THE VERY MARROW AS ITS UNDENIABLE SOURCE IS REACHED, A STEEP SLAB OF UNYIELDING STONE THAT CAN ONLY BE--
--THE WALL OF WEEPING MISTS!
THE VAULT LIES AT THE TOP OF THE ESCARPMENT--AND THE RUNESPEAR RESTS WITHIN.
SEEMS THIS SORCERER HAD LITTLE CONSIDERATION FOR GRAVEROBBERS. STILL, I'VE COME THIS FAR...
CAUTIOUSLY, RUGGED HANDS SPLAY OUT, LEATHERN BOOTS SEEK FOOTHOLDS, AS A GRUDGING, SPIDERY PROGRESS IS MADE UP THE RAIN-SLICK STONE...
UNTIL, AT LONG LAST, THE DESTINATION IS REACHED...
...AND STEEL-BLUE EYES LOCK ON A VISION OF TREASURE BEYOND IMAGINING...
...ABOVE WHICH HOVERS THE GLOWING, MYSTIC-CARVED LENGTH OF--KYRIACH!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.
12

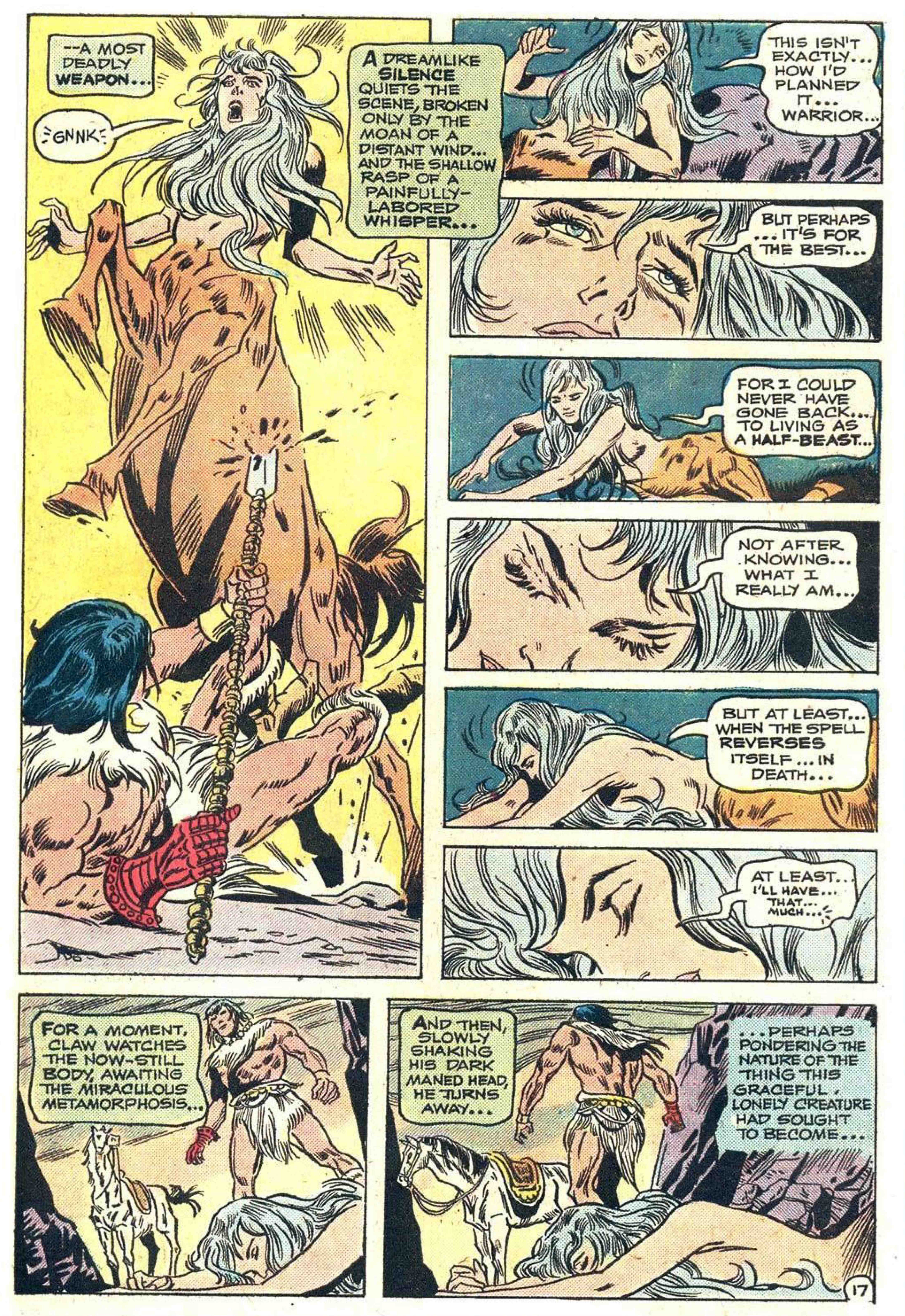


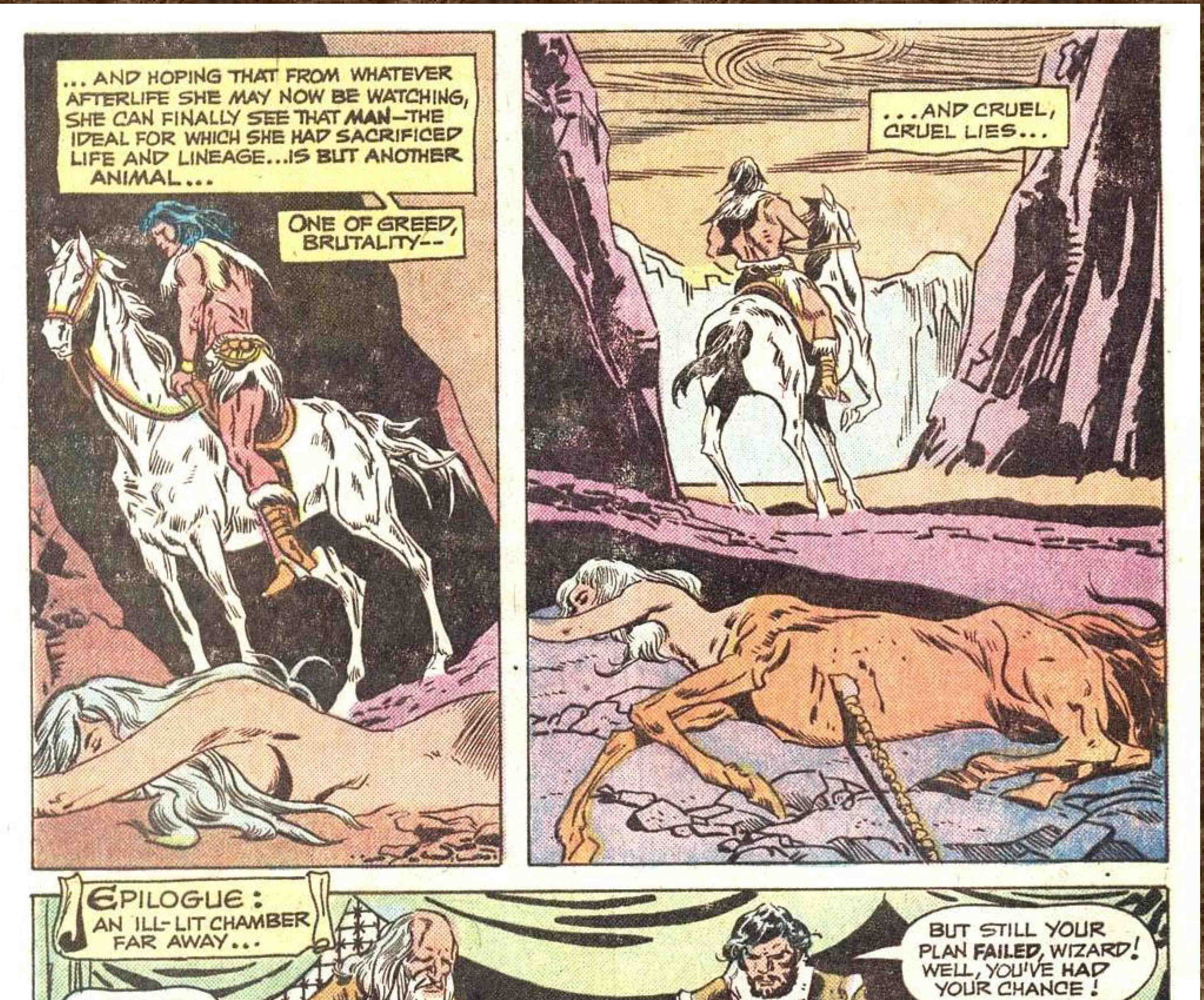
STRANGE THAT AFTER ALL THE WARNINGS OF DANGER THERE ARE NO GUARDS ABOUT.
NOTHING BUT THIS MAZE OF JUTTING ROCK!
BUT AS THE LEERY OUTLANDER MOVES FORWARD, A WAVE OF SUDDEN SLUGGISHNESS OVERCOMES HIM--AND HE SOON LEARNS WHY THE TOMB HAS NO GUARDIANS...
NONE ARE NEEDED!
GODS! MY LEGS--THEY TURN TO STONE!
IN NEAR PANIC, THE STARTLED BARBARIAN LASHES OUT--
--ONLY HOW DOES ONE FIGHT A FOE THAT ISN'T THERE...?
AND THEN...
THE CRYSTAL! I FELT NOTHING UNTIL I ENTERED ITS LIGHT!
SOTH TAKE MY SOUL IF I'M WRONG--
--FOR I'LL NOT GET A SECOND CHANCE!
SSRAKSH
13


THE CLATTER OF TUMBLING SHARDS FADES SLOWLY DOWN THE GRANITE PASSAGEWAY... AND IN ITS WAKE...
I...I'M WHOLE AGAIN!
COME, SPEAR! YOU'VE BEEN WELL-EARNED THIS DAY!
HERE, GIRL...THERE WAS NOTHING FOR ME INSIDE THAT CURSED HOLE, BUT AT LEAST YOU'VE GOT YOUR PRIZE!
NO, WARRIOR NOT YET, AT LEAST...
BECAUSE I'M AFRAID I'VE LIED TO YOU. THE SPEAR IS NOT FOR THE WIZARD--BUT FOR ME! SINCE I'VE LITTLE EXPERIENCE IN KILLING, THE SHAMAN THOUGHT IT MIGHT HELP ME OBTAIN HIS REAL FEE--
--YOUR LIFE!
YES, THOUGH I KNOW NOT WHY, THE WIZARD WILL ONLY WORK HIS MAGIC--IF I SLAY YOU!
SO FORGIVE ME, CLAW, YOU'VE BEEN A GOOD FRIEND--
--BUT I WILL HAVE MY HUMANITY!
14

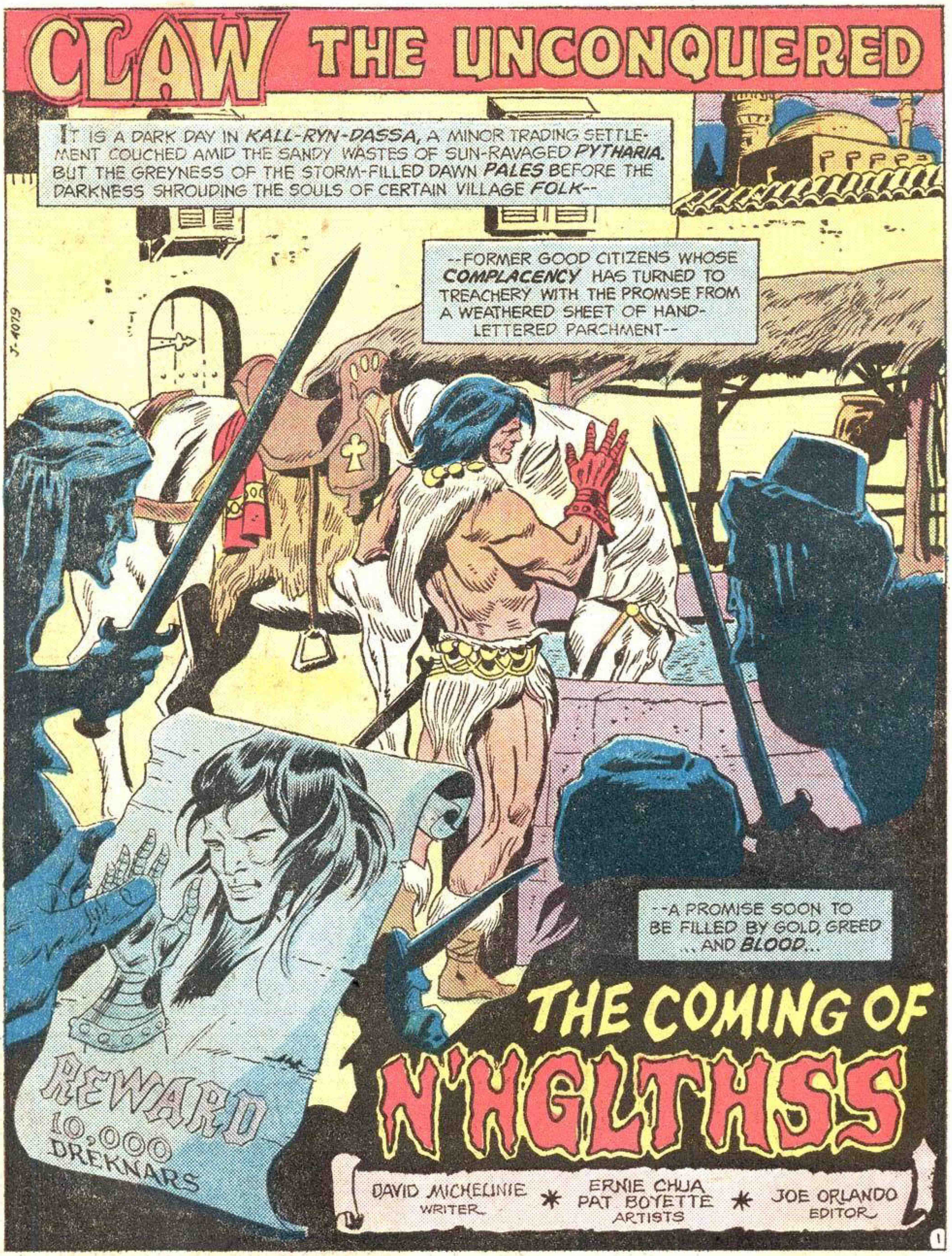

THE MYSTICALLY-CHARGED SHAFT SCREAMS DOWNWARD, BUT ITS TARGET'S REFLEXES ARE WELL-HONED--
--AND THE POINT TASTES ONLY THE BARK OF A NEARBY TREE...
...A TASTE THAT PROVES SHUDDERINGLY LETHAL, FOR THIS ENCHANTED WEAPON DRINKS NOT ONLY BLOOD--
--BUT LIFE ITSELF!
GIVE UP, CLAW! YOU'VE SEEN WHAT KYRIACH CAN DO! ONE SCRATCH WILL LEAVE YOU AS HOLLOW AND LIFELESS AS THIS HUSK!
AND EVEN YOU CAN'T DODGE FOREVER!
BUT IT IS NOT A WARRIOR'S WAY TO ACCEPT DEFEAT. FOR HE KNOWS THAT EVEN WHEN DEATH SEEMS INEVITABLE--
--FATE CAN CHANGE THE ODDS WITH ONE SHRUG OF GOD-LIKE SHOULDERS...
--OR, IN THIS CASE, WITH A FLASH OF CRIMSON STEEL...
WHA..?
15.


THE VERY AIR ITSELF CRACKS AND ROILS TO THE ERUPTION OF DARK ENERGIES, ARCANE FORCES NEVER MEANT TO BE RELEASED TO THE LIGHT OF DAY...
KZZASH
...AND WHEN THE UNHOLY TURMOIL FINALLY DIES, IT IS A MERE SHAFT OF WOOD AND IRON THAT RESTS IN THE SETTLING DUST...
THE MAGIC! I-IT'S GONE!
AYE, 'TWOULD SEEM THIS METAL HAND OF MINE HOLDS POWERS I NEVER IMAGINED!
NO! Y-YOU CAN'T ROB ME OF MY ONLY CHANCE TO BE HUMAN!
I WON'T LET YOU! I WON'T! I WON'T!
LIKE TWIN-BLADED KNIVES, THE CENTAURESS' HOOVES SLICE DEEP INTO STONE-RUBBLED EARTH--
--AS DESPERATE FURY BLINDS HER TO THE RUDEMENTARY FACT THAT A SPEAR, EVEN WITHOUT OCCULT POWERS, REMAINS--
16
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.


--A MOST DEADLY WEAPON...
GNNK
A DREAMLIKE SILENCE QUIETS THE SCENE, BROKEN ONLY BY THE MOAN OF A DISTANT WIND... AND THE SHALLOW RASP OF A PAINFULLY-LABORED WHISPER...
THIS ISN'T EXACTLY... HOW I'D PLANNED IT... WARRIOR...
BUT PERHAPS ... IT'S FOR THE BEST...
FOR I COULD NEVER HAVE GONE BACK... TO LIVING AS A HALF-BEAST...
NOT AFTER KNOWING... WHAT I REALLY AM...
BUT AT LEAST... WHEN THE SPELL REVERSES ITSELF ... IN DEATH...
AT LEAST... I'LL HAVE... THAT... MUCH...
FOR A MOMENT, CLAW WATCHES THE NOW-STILL BODY, AWAITING THE MIRACULOUS METAMORPHOSIS...
AND THEN, SLOWLY SHAKING HIS DARK MANED HEAD, HE TURNS AWAY...
... PERHAPS PONDERING THE NATURE OF THE THING THIS GRACEFUL, LONELY CREATURE HAD SOUGHT TO BECOME...
17



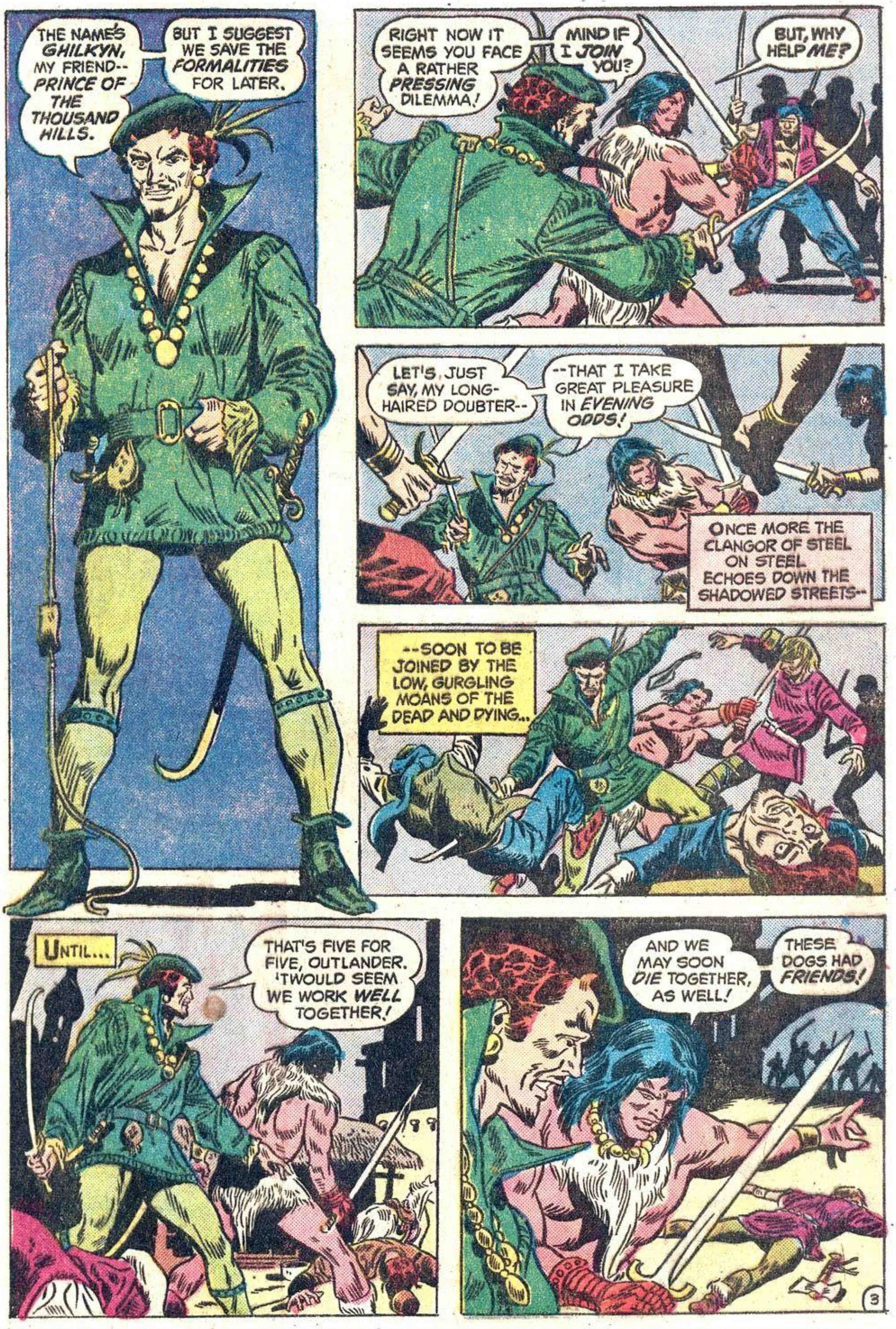
... AND HOPING THAT FROM WHATEVER AFTERLIFE SHE MAY NOW BE WATCHING, SHE CAN FINALLY SEE THAT MAN—THE IDEAL FOR WHICH SHE HAD SACRIFICED LIFE AND LINEAGE... IS BUT ANOTHER ANIMAL...
ONE OF GREED, BRUTALITY--
...AND CRUEL, CRUEL LIES...
EPILOGUE: AN ILL-LIT CHAMBER FAR AWAY...
I-I DON'T UNDERSTAND, SIRE! IT SHOULD HAVE WORKED! SHE BELIEVED MY EVERY WORD--!
BUT STILL YOUR PLAN FAILED, WIZARD! WELL, YOU'VE HAD YOUR CHANCE!
NOW, IT'S MY TURN!
B-BUT, SIRE, YOU CAN'T--
OH, BUT I CAN, MIFTUNG! MY METHODS MAY NOT BE AS SUBTLE AS YOURS, BUT THAT VILE SAVAGE STANDS BETWEEN ME AND THE RULE OF THIS UNIVERSE--
--AND I WILL SEE HIM DEAD!
EVEN IF IT MEANS DESTROYING A WORLD IN THE PROCESS!
FINI
18
NEXT ISSUE ON SALE DURING THE LAST WEEK IN AUG.



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DRINK YOUR FILL, HORSE, AND BE QUICK! THIS FLY-SPECK OF A VILLAGE GIVES ME AN UNEASY FEELING!
DON'T WORRY OVER THAT, OUTLAW--
--FOR SOON YOU WON'T FEEL ANYTHING!
BUT...
A PITY YOUR BLADE ISN'T AS QUICK AS YOUR MOUTH, CUR!
I COULD USE THE SPORT!
SPLASH
BUT IF YOUR FOUR FRIENDS HERE ARE AS SKILL-LESS AS YOU--
--I'D FIND MORE CHALLENGE PARRYING A TANKARD OF ALE!
IN TRUTH, BARBARIAN, THERE WOULD BE LITTLE TO FEAR--
--IF THE OTHER ASSASSINS DID INDEED NUMBER ONLY FOUR...
BUT SUDDENLY...
STHOK
WHO-?
2

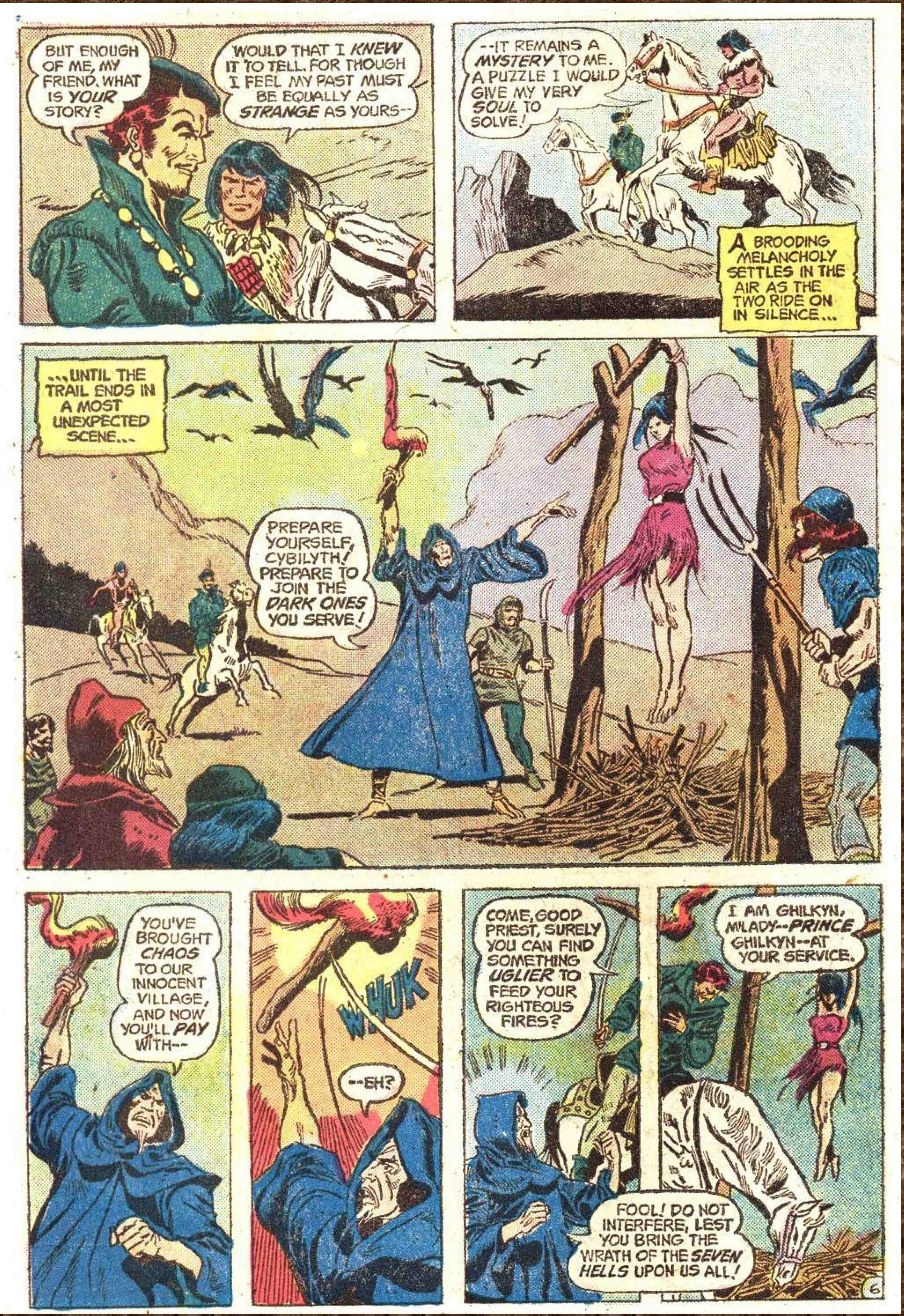

THE NAME'S GHILKYN, MY FRIEND-- PRINCE OF THE THOUSAND HILLS.
BUT I SUGGEST WE SAVE THE FORMALITIES FOR LATER.
RIGHT NOW IT SEEMS YOU FACE A RATHER PRESSING DILEMMA!
MIND IF I JOIN YOU?
BUT, WHY HELP ME?
LET'S JUST SAY, MY LONG-HAIRED DOUBTER--
--THAT I TAKE GREAT PLEASURE IN EVENING ODDS!
ONCE MORE THE CLANGOR OF STEEL ON STEEL ECHOES DOWN THE SHADOWED STREETS--
--SOON TO BE JOINED BY THE LOW, GURGLING MOANS OF THE DEAD AND DYING...
UNTIL...
THAT'S FIVE FOR FIVE, OUTLANDER. 'TWOULD SEEM WE WORK WELL TOGETHER!
AND WE MAY SOON DIE TOGETHER, AS WELL!
THESE DOGS HAD FRIENDS!
3

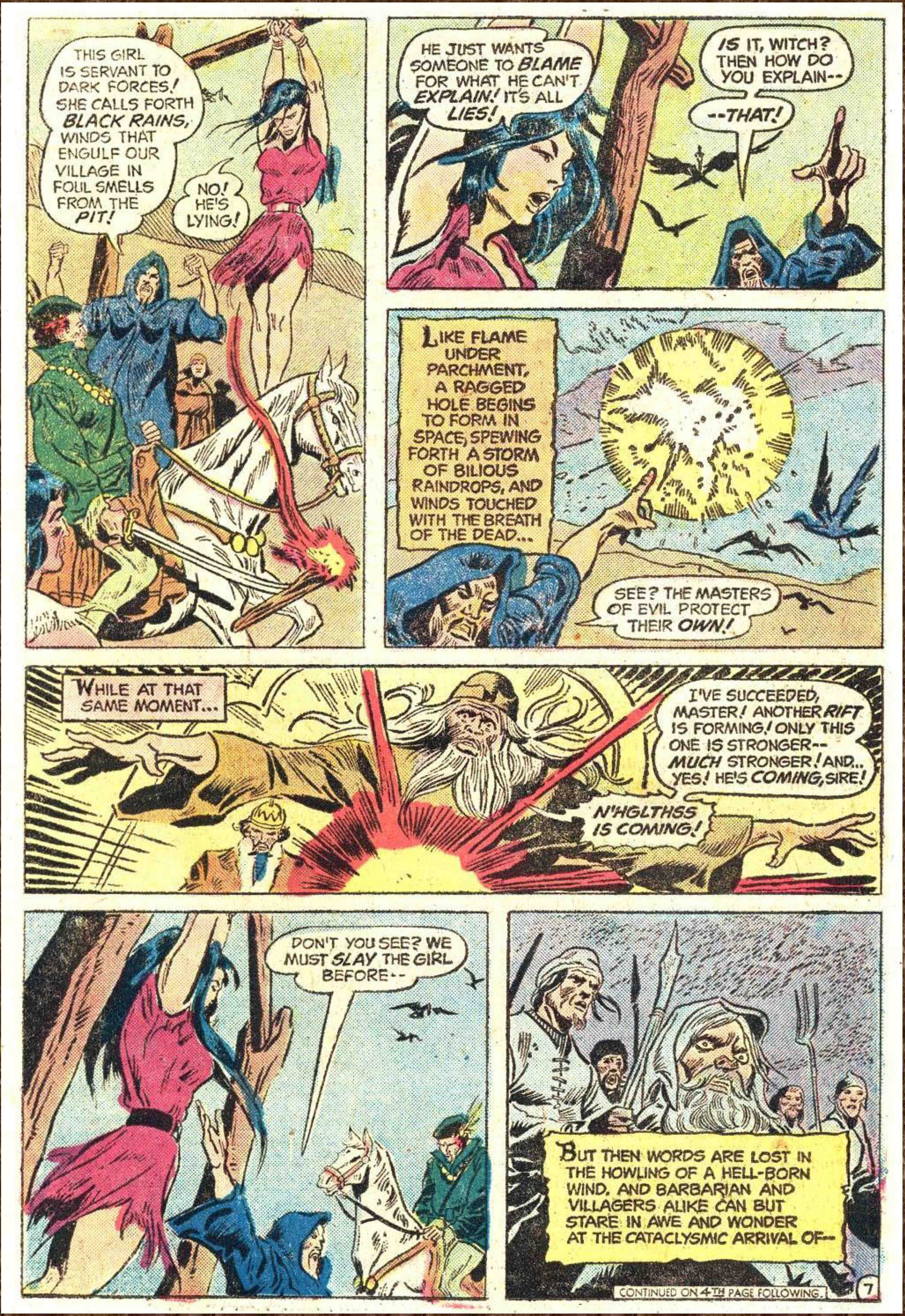


WELL, AS MY OLD UNCLE FAL-DHAREN ALWAYS USED TO SAY IN TIMES LIKE THIS--
--"FLIGHT MAKES RIGHT!"
AYE, HILL-PRINCE, THIS UNCLE OF YOURS HAD WISDOM!
HOW DO YOU THINK HE GOT TO BE OLD UNCLE FAL-DHAREN?
WHILE LEAGUES DISTANT, BEHIND THE MIST-CLOUDED RAMPARTS OF CASTLE DARKMORN...
CURSE YOU, WIZARD, I WANT RESULTS!
B-BUT, KING OCCULAS, OPENING A DOORWAY BETWEEN DIMENSIONS IS A DANGEROUS PROCESS!
PERHAPS, MIFTUNG, BUT FAILURE WOULD BE EVEN MORE DANGEROUS, IF I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR!
W-WELL, I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO OPEN SMALL RIFTS IN THE COSMIC FABRIC, SIRE, ENOUGH FOR MINOR DIABOLISMS TO ESCAPE.
BUT A HOLE BIG ENOUGH TO RELEASE WHAT YOU DESIRE TAKES TIME--!
SPEAK NOT OF TIME, WIZARD! THIS SAVAGE-- THIS CLAW--THREATENS MY ULTIMATE DOMINATION OF THE FIFTEEN WORLDS!
HE MUST BE DESTROYED-- QUICKLY!
AND NEED I REMIND YOU THAT WHEN I, THE KING, GROW IMPATIENT--
--THE DUNGEON RATS DINE WELL?
I-I'LL TRY A STRONGER INCANTATION, S-S-SIRE!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.
4



WHILE IN THE HILL-COVERED OUTLANDS...
SO, FRIEND CLAW, IT SEEMS FATE CASTS US AS COMPANION.
AYE, THOUGH I'LL ADMIT TO NEVER CALLING A DEMON "FRIEND" BEFORE!
A DEM--OH, THE HORNS! YES, I SUPPOSE I SHOULD EXPLAIN.
TELL ME, HAVE YOU EVER STUDIED MULTILINEAR COSMOLOGY?
NO? WELL, IN THAT CASE, YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO TRUST ME THAT LIFE EXISTS IN THIS UNIVERSE ON MANY LEVELS, ON MANY PLANES OF REALITY.
AND I, YOU SEE, COME FROM ONE OF THOSE OTHER PLANES!
YES, FROM A WORLD SO TERRIBLY SAFE THAT THE GREATEST PROBLEM IS BOREDOM. HENCE, I BEGAN DABBLING IN SORCERY TO PASS THE TIME.
UNTIL A RATHER EMBARRASSING BLUNDER CAST ME OUT OF MY WORLD--AND INTO YOURS!
UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE ALSO VOIDS BETWEEN PLANES--PLACES OF UNSPEAKABLE EVIL.
AND MY UNWITTING PASSAGE THROUGH ONE SUCH AREA RESULTED IN THESE RATHER UNIQUE... PROTRUSIONS.
THEY'RE A NUISANCE, I ADMIT, BUT THEY DO HAVE ADVANTAGES.
FOR INSTANCE, THE LADIES SEEM TO FIND THEM ABSOLUTELY FASCINATING!
5

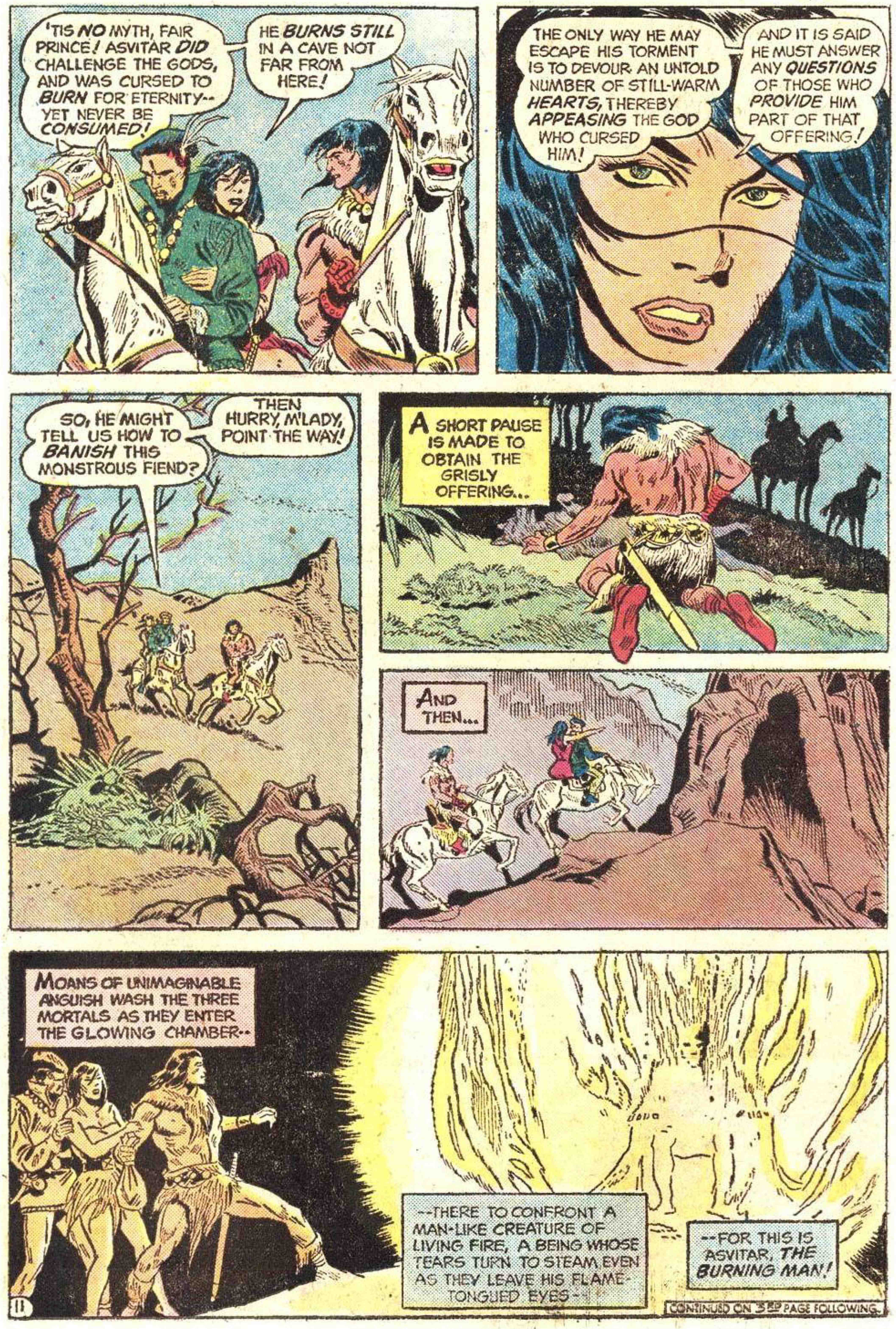

BUT ENOUGH OF ME, MY FRIEND. WHAT IS YOUR STORY?
WOULD THAT I KNEW IT TO TELL. FOR THOUGH I FEEL MY PAST MUST BE EQUALLY AS STRANGE AS YOURS--
--IT REMAINS A MYSTERY TO ME. A PUZZLE I WOULD GIVE MY VERY SOUL TO SOLVE!
A BROODING MELANCHOLY SETTLES IN THE AIR AS THE TWO RIDE ON IN SILENCE...
...UNTIL THE TRAIL ENDS IN A MOST UNEXPECTED SCENE...
PREPARE YOURSELF, CYBILYTH! PREPARE TO JOIN THE DARK ONES YOU SERVE!
YOU'VE BROUGHT CHAOS TO OUR INNOCENT VILLAGE, AND NOW YOU'LL PAY WITH--
WHUK
--EH?
COME, GOOD PRIEST, SURELY YOU CAN FIND SOMETHING UGLIER TO FEED YOUR RIGHTEOUS FIRES?
FOOL! DO NOT INTERFERE, LEST YOU BRING THE WRATH OF THE SEVEN HELLS UPON US ALL!
I AM GHILKYN, MILADY--PRINCE GHILKYN--AT YOUR SERVICE.
6


THIS GIRL IS SERVANT TO DARK FORCES! SHE CALLS FORTH BLACK RAINS, WINDS THAT ENGULF OUR VILLAGE IN FOUL SMELLS FROM THE PIT!
NO! HE'S LYING!
HE JUST WANTS SOMEONE TO BLAME FOR WHAT HE CAN'T EXPLAIN! IT'S ALL LIES!
IS IT, WITCH? THEN HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN--
--THAT!
LIKE FLAME UNDER PARCHMENT, A RAGGED HOLE BEGINS TO FORM IN SPACE, SPEWING FORTH A STORM OF BILIOUS RAINDROPS, AND WINDS TOUCHED WITH THE BREATH OF THE DEAD...
SEE? THE MASTERS OF EVIL PROTECT THEIR OWN!
WHILE AT THAT SAME MOMENT...
I'VE SUCCEEDED, MASTER! ANOTHER RIFT IS FORMING! ONLY THIS ONE IS STRONGER-- MUCH STRONGER! AND.. YES! HE'S COMING, SIRE!
N'HGLTHSS IS COMING!
DON'T YOU SEE? WE MUST SLAY THE GIRL BEFORE--
BUT THEN WORDS ARE LOST IN THE HOWLING OF A HELL-BORN WIND. AND BARBARIAN AND VILLAGERS ALIKE CAN BUT STARE IN AWE AND WONDER AT THE CATACLYSMIC ARRIVAL OF--
CONTINUED ON 4TH PAGE FOLLOWING.
7


--N'HGLTHSS THE DAMNED!
8


GODS! WHAT IS IT!
NOTHING A MERE WENCH COULD CONJURE UP, I'LL WAGER! LOOK--
--THE CARRION BIRDS FALL IN ITS PATH! AND THE GRASS WHERE IT WALKS TURNS YELLOW!
THE VILE BEAST BRINGS DEATH AT ITS VERY TOUCH!
THEN I SUGGEST WE SEE WHAT THE TOUCH OF STEEL BRINGS TO IT!
BUT AS THE TWO HEROES ATTACK THE SLIME-LIMBED MONOLITH...
OUR BLOWS! IT DOESN'T SEEM TO FEEL THEM!
AYE, IT LOOKS NOT TO NOTICE ANYTHING! AS THOUGH IT WERE HALF ASLEEP!
PERHAPS THE THING NEEDS TIME TO ACCUSTOM ITSELF TO THIS DIMENSION!
THEN BY THE GODS, WE MIGHT USE THAT SLUGGISHNESS AGAINST IT!
HURRIEDLY, CLAW LIFTS A CRUDE LANCE DISCARDED BY ONE OF THE FLEEING VILLAGERS...
...AND WITH STRENGTH BORN OF DESPERATION, RAMS IT DOWN--
TSUK
--PIERCING THE GIANT'S FLESH UNTIL THE POINT LODGES DEEP IN THE DUSTY EARTH BELOW!
9
CONTINUED ON 5TH PAGE FOLLOWING


UNFEELING OF THE WOODEN SHAFT PINNING IT TO THE GROUND, THE LUMBERING MONSTER ATTEMPTS TO CONTINUE ITS FORWARD STRIDE.
ONLY TO FIND IN A MOMENT OF DULL-EYED CONFUSION--
--THAT IT CANNOT...
KWUMPH
COME, M'LADY, WE MUST BE AWAY BEFORE THE THING REGAINS ITS SENSES!
B-BUT, WHAT OF MY VILLAGE?
SOTH, GIRL, THOSE CURS TRIED TO KILL YOU!
NO! ONLY THE PRIEST WAS AT FAULT! I ONCE ANGERED HIM BY DENYING HIM--AND HE SOUGHT THIS OPPORTUNITY FOR REVENGE!
THE OTHERS MERELY FOLLOWED BECAUSE THEY WERE FRIGHTENED BY THE SORCERY THAT BESETS US OF LATE.
EVEN SO, TO REMAIN WOULD BE TO PERISH! THAT MONSTER CAN'T BE KILLED!
BUT THERE MIGHT BE A WAY! IF YOU'VE THE COURAGE TO CONSULT--
--ASVITAR!
YOU MEAN, THE ROGUE WHO WAS SAID TO HAVE CHALLENGED THE ELDER GODS THEMSELVES? BUT THAT'S JUST MYTH!
10


'TIS NO MYTH, FAIR PRINCE! ASVITAR DID CHALLENGE THE GODS, AND WAS CURSED TO BURN FOR ETERNITY-- YET NEVER BE CONSUMED!
HE BURNS STILL IN A CAVE NOT FAR FROM HERE!
THE ONLY WAY HE MAY ESCAPE HIS TORMENT IS TO DEVOUR AN UNTOLD NUMBER OF STILL-WARM HEARTS, THEREBY APPEASING THE GOD WHO CURSED HIM!
AND IT IS SAID HE MUST ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS OF THOSE WHO PROVIDE HIM PART OF THAT OFFERING!
SO, HE MIGHT TELL US HOW TO BANISH THIS MONSTROUS FIEND?
THEN HURRY, M'LADY, POINT THE WAY!
A SHORT PAUSE IS MADE TO OBTAIN THE GRISLY OFFERING...
AND THEN...
MOANS OF UNIMAGINABLE ANGUISH WASH THE THREE MORTALS AS THEY ENTER THE GLOWING CHAMBER--
--THERE TO CONFRONT A MAN-LIKE CREATURE OF LIVING FIRE, A BEING WHOSE TEARS TURN TO STEAM EVEN AS THEY LEAVE HIS FLAME-TONGUED EYES--!
--FOR THIS IS ASVITAR, THE BURNING MAN!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.


WE BRING YOUR PRICE, CURSED ONE! IN RETURN WE ASK--
I KNOW WHAT YOU REQUIRE, CLAW OF PYTHARIA. BRING FORTH THE OFFERING --AND YOU SHALL HAVE IT!
AND AFTER THE DRIPPING HEART-MEAT HAS BEEN CONSUMED...
YOU'VE SHORTENED MY TIME OF TRIAL, WARRIOR, BUT I'M AFRAID YOURS HAS JUST BEGUN!
YOU WISH TO DEFEAT THE DEATH-DEMON, N'HGLTHSS. SUCH A TASK CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED-- BUT ONLY BY MOONTHORN, A SILVERN SWORD OF UNIQUE PROPERTIES--
--AND A BLADE THAT IS YOURS BY RIGHT OF LAW!
YES, MOONTHORN WAS TO HAVE BEEN GIVEN YOU AT RELEASE, ALONG WITH THE CRIMSON GAUNTLET YOU WEAR.
ONLY IT WAS STOLEN BY THE FORCES OF EVIL-- AND SECRETED IN A NETHER VOID.
TO ENTER THAT VOID YOU MUST USE AN ARCANE TALISMAN CALLED THE GRIMSTONE. BUT YOUR ENEMIES KNOW THIS AND HAVE DISPERSED THE TALISMAN'S THREE FACETS TO DIFFERENT LOCATIONS.
ATTEND, AND I WILL TELL YOU WHERE...
12


THE INFORMATION GIVEN, THE TRIO OF QUESTIONERS TURNS TO LEAVE, BUT THEN...
ASVITAR, YOU SEEM TO KNOW SO MUCH--WHILE I KNOW SO LITTLE. YOU SPOKE OF MY RELEASE, OF THE RIGHT OF LAW. CAN YOU NOT AT LEAST TELL ME--
I'M SORRY, LORD CLAW, BUT THERE ARE SOME THINGS EVEN I AM FORBIDDEN TO REVEAL...
AND AS THE THREE MORTALS EMERGE ONCE MORE...
WELL, CLAW, WE'VE QUITE A JOB AHEAD OF US. SHALL WE START?
I'M NOT SURE I WILL START, HILL-PRINCE!
WHAT-? BUT N'HGLTHSS! HE COULD DESTROY THE WORLD--!
AND WHY SHOULD I CARE? THIS WORLD HAS GIVEN ME NAUGHT BUT PAIN, SORROW, HATRED!
FOR ALL I KNOW, I MAY NOT EVEN BE PART OF THE RACE YOU EXPECT ME TO SAVE! SO WHY SHOULD I RISK--
L-LOOK!
THE MONSTER'S AWAKE! I-IT ATTACKS THE VILLAGE!
13



ATTACK? THE WORD SEEMS PITIFULLY INADEQUATE. FOR AN ATTACK IMPLIES ANGER, METHOD-- WHILE THIS UNHOLY BEAST MERELY SHAMBLES FORWARD IN A TORPOR-LIKE DAZE, SEEMINGLY OBLIVIOUS TO THE FLESH THAT ROTS AT ITS TOUCH--
--THE BUILDINGS THAT CRUMBLE IN ITS WAKE--
--AND THE SCREAMS THAT CARRY CLEARLY TO A CRAGGY HILL-TOP NEARBY...
VERY WELL, MY FRIEND, YOU CAN STAY HERE AND PONDER THE MYSTERIES OF LIFE IF YOU WISH.
BUT IF YOU'VE NOT THE STOMACH FOR SAVING YOUR WORLD--
--YOU'LL FIND THAT I HAVE!


PANIC RULES THE SHATTERED HAMLET AS THE GRIM-FACED SWORDSMEN ARRIVE--
--KNOWING ALL TOO WELL THAT DEATH WILL LIKE BE THE ONLY REWARD FOR THEIR EFFORTS...
YET KNOWING AT THE SAME TIME-- THEY MUST TRY...
THEN SLOWLY, AS IN A DREAM, A GARGANTUAN HEAD SWIVELS ON A DOUGH-LIKE NECK--
--AND PALE AMBER EYES PEER DOWNWARD WITH THE SLIGHTEST HINT OF... ANNOYANCE...
AND THEN THE PONDEROUS BEAST RETURNS, TO ITS SHUFFLING STRIDE, WAVING A SCAB-CRUSTED HAND IN A GESTURE OF BORED DISMISSAL...
BUT ON THE HILLSIDE ABOVE, THE RESULTS OF THAT GESTURE ARE FAR LESS CASUAL...
...AS THE CORPSES OF THE DEAD CARRION BIRDS QUIVER, JERK AND RISK AWKWARDLY TO THE SKY...
...THE HOLLOWNESS OF THEIR EMPTY SOCKETS AGLOW WITH SINISTER PURPOSE...
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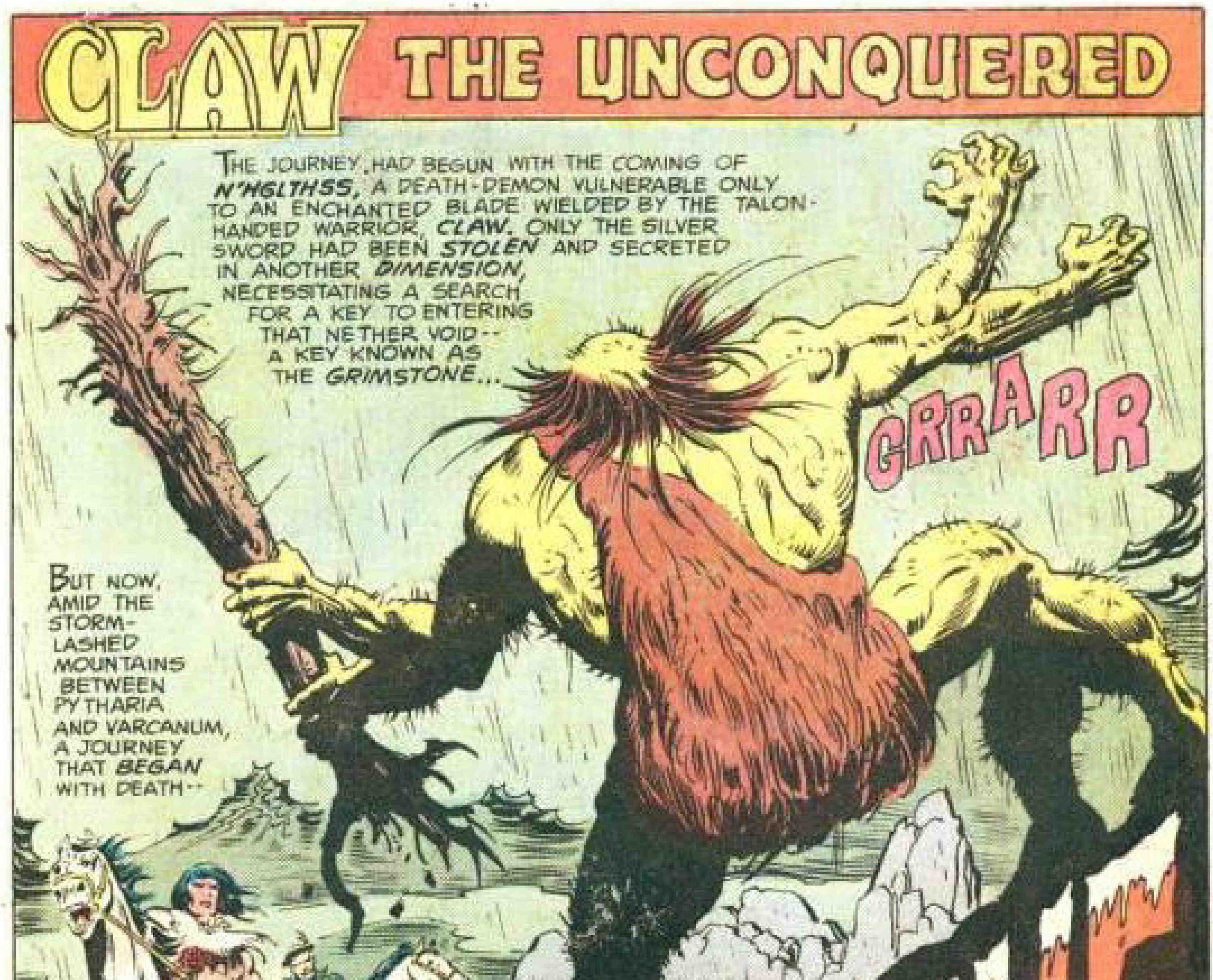


SOTH! MUST WE DULL OUR BLADES ON THIS DEMON'S UNFEELING FLESH FOREVER?
SOMEHOW, FRIEND CLAW, I DON'T THINK WE'LL HAVE THAT MUCH TIME!
LOOK!
ALL THOUGHTS OF LUMBERING N'HGLTHSS ARE PUSHED ASIDE THEN, AS THE VILLAGE SQUARE FILLS WITH THE BEAT OF WITHERED WINGS AND THE DULL CRUNCH OF STEEL ON BONE...
A DIN BROKEN SHORTLY BY THE SUDDENNESS OF A YOUNG GIRL'S SCREAM...
NO! P-PLEASE--!
YOU ESCAPED MY WRATH ONCE, CYBILYTH! YOU'LL NOT ESCAPE IT A SECOND--
16


BUT EVEN IN A WORLD BEYOND TIME, THERE IS SUCH A THING AS JUSTICE...
AAIIIIEEEE!
GHILKYN! TO THE GIRL!
THUS THE SIEGE BEGINS, THE STAND IS MADE...
...AND WHO CAN FAULT THE GLINT OF MADNESS RAGING IN THE YOUNG BARBARIAN'S EYES...
...FOR HOW CAN IT BE ANYTHING BUT LUNACY TO ATTEMPT THE SLAYING OF CREATURES ALREADY DEAD...?
BUT SUCH LOGIC IS FORGOTTEN AS HARDENED STEEL ARCS TIME AND AGAIN--
--AND MORE OF THE CADAVEROUS DEATHBIRDS DROP IN STILL-PULSING PIECES TO THE GROUND--
--UNTIL, AT LONG LAST, THERE IS NO FOE LEFT TO FALL...
IT'S... OVER.
NOT QUITE, GIRL, FOR IT SEEMS THE CAUSE OF THIS SLAUGHTER HAS MEANDERED AWAY WHILE WE FOUGHT.
THOUGH HE LEFT QUITE A LEGACY BEHIND.
LEGACY, MY FRIEND-- OR PROPHECY?
FOR WHO CAN SAY THAT WITH SUCH A FIEND LOOSE IN THE LAND-- THE ENTIRE WORLD WILL NOT SOON LOOK THE SAME!
17



OH, B-BUT SURELY YOU'LL GO AFTER IT, YOU'LL STOP THE BEAST--?
I'M AFRAID THERE'S BUT ONE MAN WHO CAN MAKE THAT DECISION, M'LADY.
MY PREFERENCES CHANGE NOT. I STILL HAVE NO LOVE FOR THIS WORLD, BUT, UNFORTUNATELY... IT'S THE ONLY WORLD I'VE GOT.
SO COME ALONG IF YOU WILL, HILL-PRINCE. YOUR WISDOM MAY PROVE USEFUL,
FOR I'VE A FEELING THE ROAD THAT LIES AHEAD WILL BE A LONG ONE.
A VERY LONG ONE, INDEED...
18
NEXT ISSUE: GRIMSTONE QUEST
ON SALE DURING THE LAST WEEK IN OCTOBER



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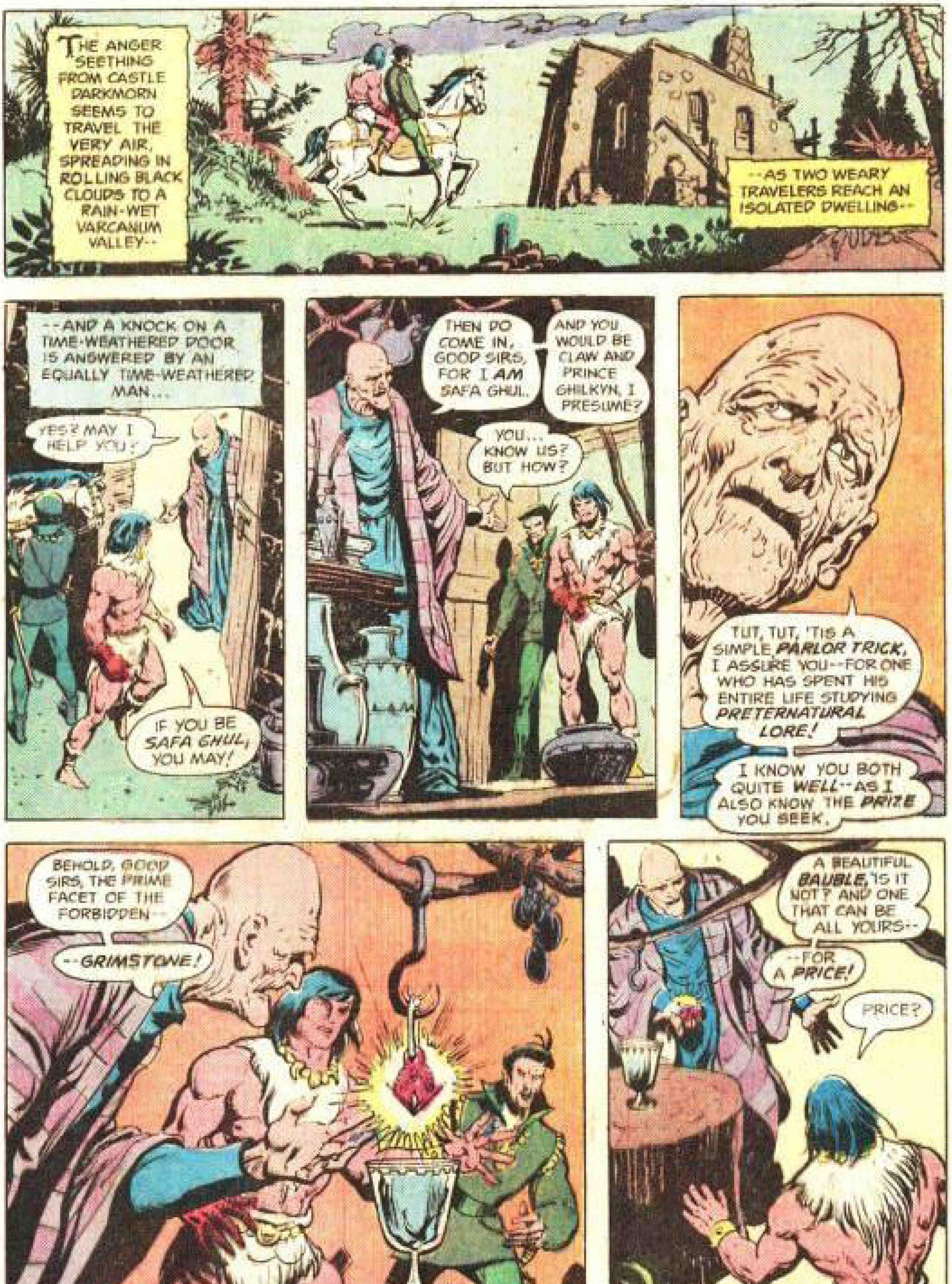
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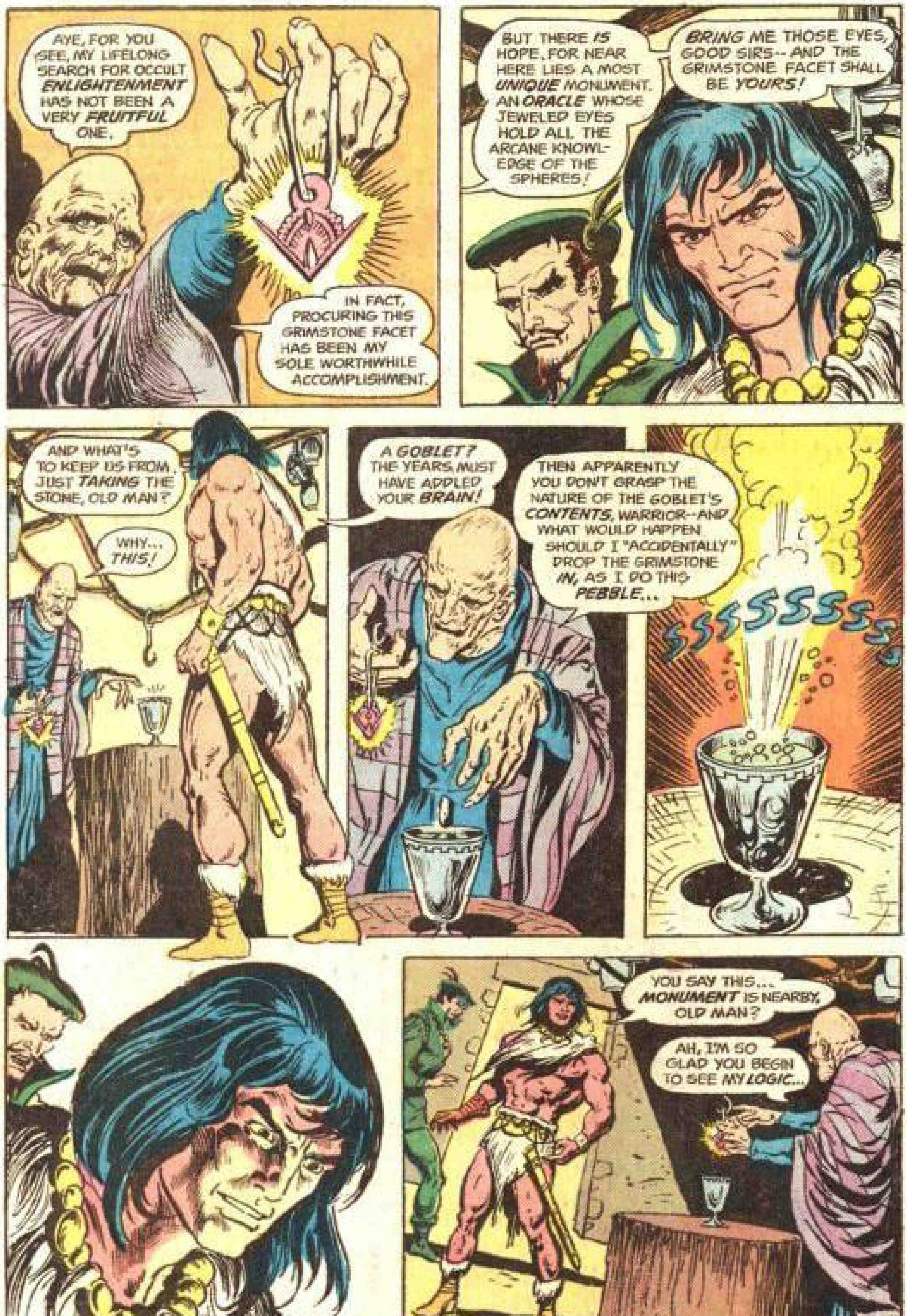

GODS! IS THERE NO END TO THE MONSTERS PROWLING THIS WORLD?
PERHAPS WE'D BEST DISCUSS THEIR END LATER, FRIEND CLAW--
--AFTER WE'VE DISPOSED OF THE ONE AT HAND!
BUT, THE "ONE AT HAND" HAS IDEAS OF ITS OWN...
WHRASH
BY THE SEVEN HELLS, THAT WAS A GOOD HORSE! THE BEAST MAKES THIS A PERSONAL FIGHT!
ANGERED, CLAW SENDS HIS GREAT BROADSWORD SLICING DEEP INTO CHALKY FLESH...
...WHILE NEARBY, THE SLIMMER, RAZOR-EDGED BLADES OF GHILKYN, PRINCE OF THE THOUSAND HILLS, SING IN DEADLY HARMONY...
...BUT BOTH TO FRIGHTFULLY SMALL EFFECT...
OUR BLOWS ONLY ANGER THE BEAST! AT THIS RATE, WE'LL BE HERE FOR DAYS!
THEN I SUGGEST WE DO SOMETHING TO SHORTEN THAT VIGIL!
HERE, YOU ONE-EYED OAF! SEE IF YOU CAN FARE BETTER WITH A BLADE!
WHA-? HAVE YOU GONE MAD?!
2


BUT IT IS NOT MADNESS LIGHTING CLAW'S IRON-COLD EYES AS THE CYCLOPEAN HORROR GRASPS THE LEATHERN SWORDHILT...
FOR WHETHER IT BE NATIVE CUNNING, OR AN INTELLIGENCE BEYOND HIS LOT, THE GRIM BARBARIAN KNOWS THAT TO RAISE STEEL ABOVE HIGH GROUND IN SUCH A FIERY STORM AS THIS--
--IS TO COURT DISASTER IN ITS DEADLIEST FORM!
KZZZZZAAAZZZTTTT
WELL, WELL, CLAW! YOUR RESOURCEFUL-NESS CONTINUES TO AMAZE ME!
'TWAS NECESSITY, HILL-PRINCE, NOTHING MORE. FOR THE BURNING MAN REVEALED THAT THE FIRST OF THE THREE FACETS OF THE GRIMSTONE LIES IN VARCANUM--*
--AND SINCE THIS LOUT STOOD IN THE WAY, HE SIMPLY HAD TO BE... REMOVED.
* SEE LAST ISSUE
3



THEN YOU STILL DON'T CARE MUCH FOR SAVING YOUR WORLD, EH? EVEN WHILE N'HGLTHSS ROAMS FREELY, BRINGING DEATH AT ITS MEREST TOUCH?
HMPH. CARE FOR A WORLD THAT STALKS ME FOR THE PRICE ON MY HEAD?
NO, I SEEK THE SILVER SWORD BECAUSE IT MIGHT OFFER A CLUE TO MY SHADOWED PAST--
--AND IF I HAPPEN TO SAVE A WORLD IN THE BARGAIN, 'TIS NO FAULT OF MY OWN...
WHILE LEAGUES AWAY TO THE EAST, ALONG THE WIND-WHIPPED BATTLEMENTS OF CASTLE DARKMORN...
UH, KING OCCULAS, I-I'M AFRAID I'VE BAD TIDINGS TO REPORT--
NO, WIZARD, LET ME GUESS! THE BEAST YOU SUMMONED TO GUARD VARCANUM PASS PROVED... INADEQUATE?
W-WELL, SIRE, YOU SEE--
SAVE THE EXCUSES, MIFTUNG, AND GET BACK TO YOUR CONJURINGS!
FOR IF THAT UPSTART SAVAGE SUCCEEDS IN HIS QUEST, I MAY LOSE ALL CHANCE OF RULING THE FIFTEEN WORLDS!
AND IF THAT SHOULD HAPPEN, GOOD WIZARD, I NEEDN'T REMIND YOU WHAT YOU WOULD LOSE... DO I?
UH, N-N-NO, SIRE! GULP!
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4

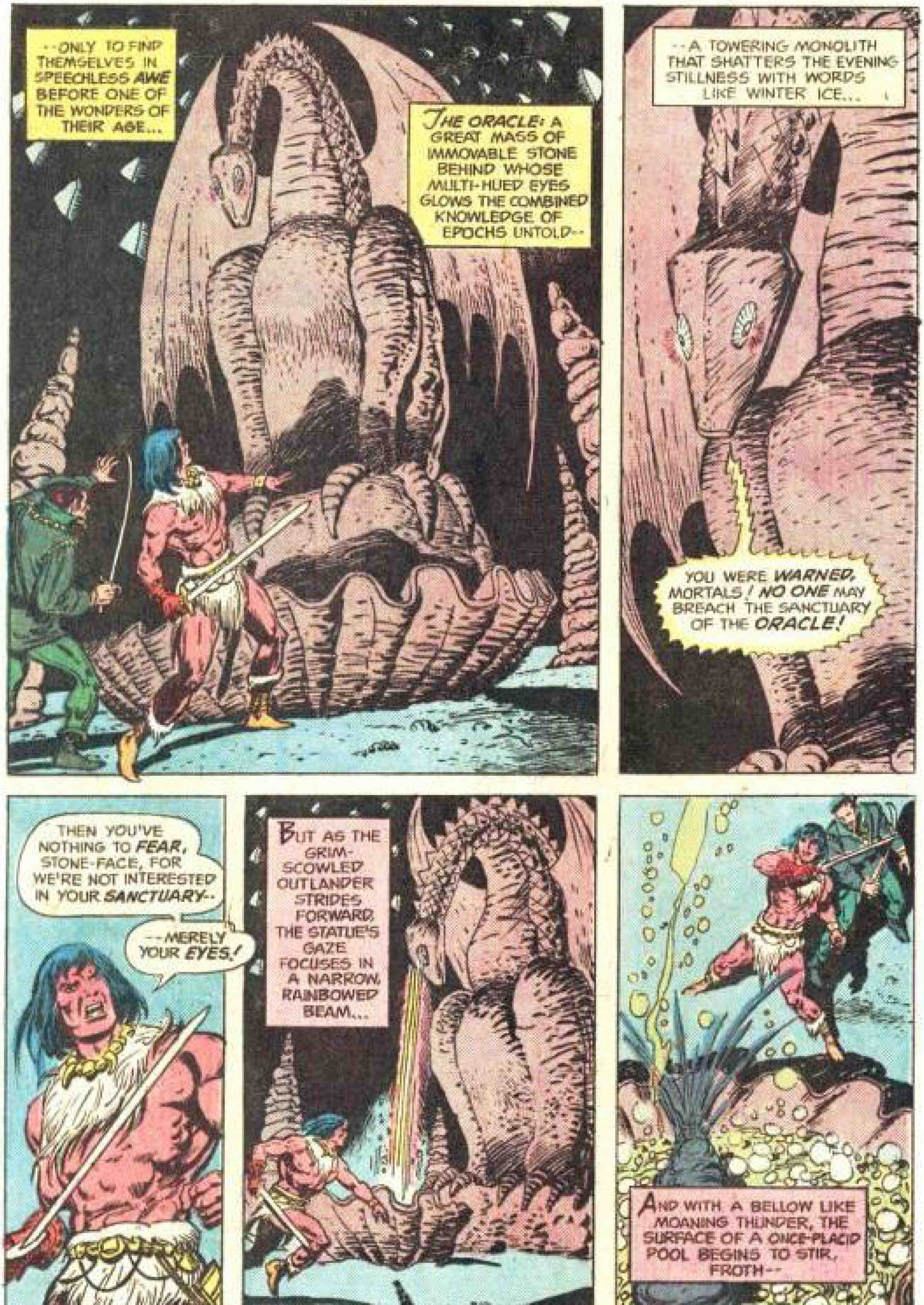

THE ANGER SEETHING FROM CASTLE DARKMORN SEEMS TO TRAVEL THE VERY AIR, SPREADING IN ROLLING BLACK CLOUDS TO A RAIN-WET VARCANUM VALLEY--
--AS TWO WEARY TRAVELERS REACH AN ISOLATED DWELLING--
--AND A KNOCK ON A TIME-WEATHERED DOOR IS ANSWERED BY AN EQUALLY TIME-WEATHERED MAN...
YES? MAY I HELP YOU?
IF YOU BE SAFA GHUL, YOU MAY!
THEN DO COME IN, GOOD SIRS, FOR I AM SAFA GHUL.
AND YOU WOULD BE CLAW AND PRINCE GHILKYN, I PRESUME?
YOU... KNOW US? BUT HOW?
TUT, TUT, 'TIS A SIMPLE PARLOR TRICK, I ASSURE YOU--FOR ONE WHO HAS SPENT HIS ENTIRE LIFE STUDYING PRETERNATURAL LORE!
I KNOW YOU BOTH QUITE WELL--AS I ALSO KNOW THE PRIZE YOU SEEK.
BEHOLD, GOOD SIRS, THE PRIME FACET OF THE FORBIDDEN--
--GRIMSTONE!
A BEAUTIFUL BAUBLE, IS IT NOT? AND ONE THAT CAN BE ALL YOURS--
--FOR A PRICE!
PRICE?
5

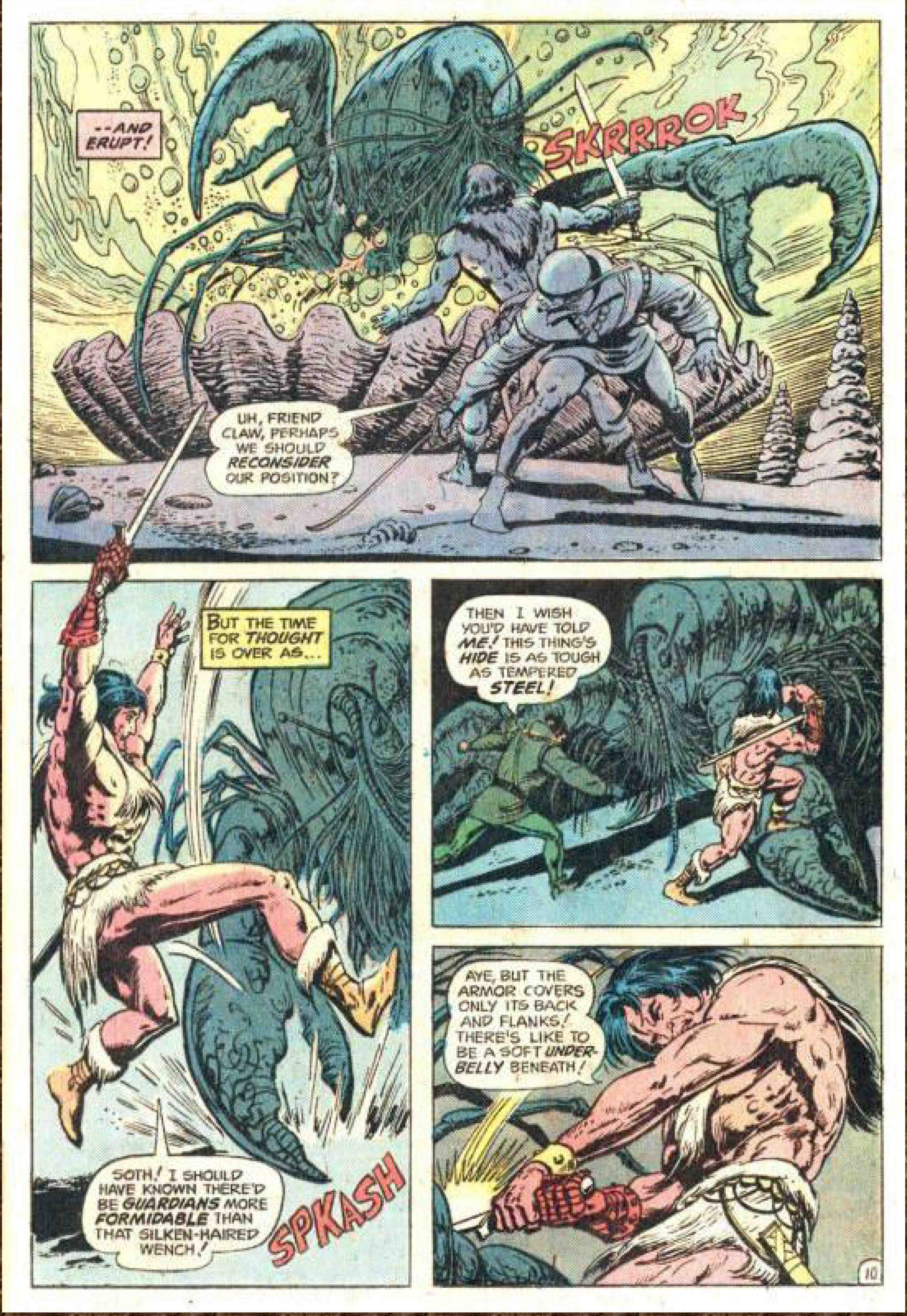

AYE, FOR YOU SEE, MY LIFELONG SEARCH FOR OCCULT ENLIGHTENMENT HAS NOT BEEN A VERY FRUITFUL ONE.
IN FACT, PROCURING THIS GRIMSTONE FACET HAS BEEN MY SOLE WORTHWHILE ACCOMPLISHMENT.
BUT THERE IS HOPE, FOR NEAR HERE LIES A MOST UNIQUE MONUMENT. AN ORACLE WHOSE JEWELED EYES HOLD ALL THE ARCANE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SPHERES!
BRING ME THOSE EYES, GOOD SIRS-- AND THE GRIMSTONE FACET SHALL BE YOURS!
AND WHAT'S TO KEEP US FROM JUST TAKING THE STONE, OLD MAN?
WHY... THIS!
A GOBLET? THE YEARS MUST HAVE ADDLED YOUR BRAIN!
THEN APPARENTLY YOU DON'T GRASP THE NATURE OF THE GOBLET'S CONTENTS, WARRIOR--AND WHAT WOULD HAPPEN SHOULD I "ACCIDENTALLY" DROP THE GRIMSTONE IN, AS I DO THIS PEBBLE...
SSSSSSSSS
YOU SAY THIS... MONUMENT IS NEARBY, OLD MAN?
AH, I'M SO GLAD YOU BEGIN TO SEE MY LOGIC...
6


AND HOURS LATER, WITH WEAPONS AND MOUNTS PROVIDED BY THE SCHOLAR, SAFA GHUL...
I DON'T TRUST THAT OLD MAN. HE WOULDN'T SEND OTHERS ON SO IMPORTANT AN ERRAND UNLESS THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE DANGER INVOLVED!
AYE. THOUGH FOR MY PART, I CAN'T COMPLAIN.
FOR HAD I REMAINED ON MY HOME WORLD OF AWADAKA, I'D NO DOUBT HAVE PERISHED FROM BOREDOM BY NO--EH?
EEYYYAAAGH
A MAN'S SCREAM!
AND ONE MORE OF TERROR THAN PAIN!
SWIFTLY, THE STARTLED RIDERS SPUR THEIR MOUNTS IN THE DIRECTION OF THE FAST-FADING CRIES...
...UNTIL AT LAST, THEY TOP THE RISE OF A GRASSY DUNE TO DISCOVER...
THE SHRINE OF THE ORACLE!
AYE, AND NO DOUBT THE SOURCE OF THAT SCREAM! WE'D BE WISE TO APPROACH WITH NAKED BLADES!
CONTINUED ON 4TH PAGE FOLLOWING
7



CAUTIOUSLY, THE TWO HORSEMEN CROSS THE SANDY SHORE TOWARDS THE CRUMBLING EDIFICE...WHEN SUDDENLY...
NO! GO BACK! YOU MUST FLEE BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!
WHO-!
I AM MLRISSA-- SLAVE TO THE ORACLE! IT IS MY TASK TO WARN YOU!
THERE ARE NO RICHES TO BE FOUND HERE! THERE IS ONLY--
--DEATH!
GODS! IT MUST HAVE BEEN HIS SCREAM WE HEARD!
AND NO WONDER! HE LOOKS AS THOUGH HIS VERY SOUL HAD BEEN TORN FROM HIM!
HE WAS A FORTUNE-SEEKER, A STUBBORN MAN WHO WOULDN'T HEED MY WORDS!
BUT I PRAY THAT YOU WILL BE WISER! YOU'LL LEAVE BEFORE--
WE'LL LEAVE, GIRL--AFTER WE'VE GOT WHAT WE CAME FOR!
OH, PLEASE! YOU MUST STOP HIM!
I'M SORRY, M'LADY, BUT CLAW HAS A MIND OF HIS OWN. AND ANYWAY--
--HE'S BIGGER THAN ME!
BLADES DRAWN, THE TWO WARRIORS CROSS THE SHADOW-DARK THRESHOLD--
8


--ONLY TO FIND THEMSELVES IN SPEECHLESS AWE BEFORE ONE OF THE WONDERS OF THEIR AGE...
THE ORACLE: A GREAT MASS OF IMMOVABLE STONE BEHIND WHOSE MULTI-HUED EYES GLOWS THE COMBINED KNOWLEDGE OF EPOCHS UNTOLD--
--A TOWERING MONOLITH THAT SHATTERS THE EVENING STILLNESS WITH WORDS LIKE WINTER ICE...
YOU WERE WARNED, MORTALS! NO ONE MAY BREACH THE SANCTUARY OF THE ORACLE!
THEN YOU'VE NOTHING TO FEAR, STONE-FACE, FOR WE'RE NOT INTERESTED IN YOUR SANCTUARY--
--MERELY YOUR EYES!
BUT AS THE GRIM-SCOWLED OUTLANDER STRIDES FORWARD, THE STATUE'S GAZE FOCUSES IN A NARROW, RAINBOWED BEAM...
AND WITH A BELLOW LIKE MOANING THUNDER, THE SURFACE OF A ONCE-PLACID POOL BEGINS TO STIR, FROTH--
CONTINUED ON 5TH PAGE FOLLOWING
9


--AND ERUPT!
SKRRROK
UH, FRIEND CLAW, PERHAPS WE SHOULD RECONSIDER OUR POSITION?
BUT THE TIME FOR THOUGHT IS OVER AS...
SOTH! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THERE'D BE GUARDIANS MORE FORMIDABLE THAN THAT SILKEN-HAIRED WENCH!
SPKASH
THEN I WISH YOU'D HAVE TOLD ME! THIS THING'S HIDE IS AS TOUGH AS TEMPERED STEEL!
AYE, BUT THE ARMOR COVERS ONLY ITS BACK AND FLANKS! THERE'S LIKE TO BE A SOFT UNDER-BELLY BENEATH!
10



WONDERFUL! THEN AS SOON AS YOU'VE CHARMED IT INTO STANDING ON ITS HIND LEGS, LIKE A GOOD LITTLE MONSTER--
--I'LL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO RUN IT THROUGH!
I'M AFRAID THAT'S BEYOND ME, HILL-PRINCE--
--BUT PERHAPS A MORE DIRECT APPROACH WILL SERVE!
LIKE A RAGING BERSERKER, THE SUN-BRONZED SAVAGE HURLS HIMSELF AT THE HEAVILY SCALED MONSTROSITY, A SEEMINGLY RASH ACTION--
--WITH HORRIBLY PREDICTABLE RESULTS...
WHACK
UNNNNNNN
AND THEN, GURGLING WITH OBSCENE SATISFACTION, THE SLIME-CRUSTED MONSTER SCUTTLES FORWARD--
--INTENT ON MAKING A MEAL OF ITS NOW-STILL ADVERSARY...
BUT HAD THE BEAST TAKEN A MOMENT TO OBSERVE ITS PREY--
IT MIGHT HAVE NOTED A HINT OF THAT SAME SATIS-FACTION CURLING THE FALLEN BAR-BARIAN'S LIPS--
--AND THUS, MIGHT HAVE REALIZED THE ONLY MEAL ITS BELLY WOULD KNOW THIS DAY--
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING
11


--WOULD BE SEVERAL FEET OF COLD VARCANUM STEEL!
SKRREEOK
FOR A MOMENT, THE CHAMBER ECHOES TO THE RATTLE OF DEATH THROES...AND THEN...
WE'D BEST TAKE THE SPOILS AND BE ON OUR WAY--BEFORE WE'RE TREATED TO ANY MORE LITTLE SURPRISES!
BUT AS CLAW TURNS BACK TO THE STONE IDOL...
YOU KILLED THE GUARDIAN! YOU'VE FREED ME!
OH, 'TWAS NOTHING, M'LADY.
MERELY COURAGE, QUICK WITS, UNCOMMONLY FINE SWORDSMANSHIP...
BUT YOU MUST LET ME THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEEDS.
NOW, THAT REALLY ISN'T NECESSARY...
...BUT IF YOU INSIST...
A TOUCHING SCENE, AS OLD AS TRADITION. THE RESCUED DAMSEL REWARDING HER GALLANT HERO...
ONLY IN THIS INSTANCE, THE DAMSEL IS SOMEWHAT MORE THAN SHE SEEMS...
...AND THE REWARD, SOMEWHAT MORE... DEADLY...
NGYAAAAA
12


UNREASONING FEAR TUGS AT CLAW'S SPINE AS HE TURNS, FOR THOUGH HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THE HIDEOUSLY-TWISTED FORM THE GIRL HAS TAKEN--
--HE SOMEHOW SENSES IT TO HOUSE A CORE OF UNSPEAKABLE EVIL...
...A CORE THAT HAD SUCKED DRY THE SOUL OF THE UNFORTUNATE MAN OUTSIDE THE SHRINE--
--AND NOW SEEKS TO DO THE SAME TO HIS ONLY TRUSTED FRIEND...
IT IS A THOUGHT TO STRIKE FROST TO THE HEART OF EVEN THE HEARTIEST WARRIOR...
SWWATCH
THAT WAS A STUPID THING TO DO, HILL-PRINCE. SOME WENCH WILL BE THE DEATH OF YOU YET!
PERHAPS, FRIEND CLAW. *KOFF* BUT CAN YOU THINK OF A PLEASANTER WAY TO--
WHA--? NO! I-IT CAN'T BE!
IGNORANT MORTALS! YOU CANNOT DESTROY ENERGY WITH A BLADE--YOU CAN MERELY DIVIDE IT! ESPECIALLY WHEN THAT ENERGY IS THE LIFE ESSENCE OF--
--THE ORACLE!



FOR SINCE LIFE CANNOT RESIDE IN DEAD STONE, SO MUST MY ESSENCE EXIST INDEPENDENTLY OF MY BODY, SUBJECT TO THE WILL OF MY ALL-SEEING EYES!
THIS FORM WAS CHOSEN TO WARN AWAY FORTUNE HUNTERS LIKE YOURSELVES!
BUT YOU DIDN'T LISTEN-- YOU NEVER LISTEN!
THUS DOES MAN EVER SEAL HIS OWN DOOM!
AT FIRST THE SIGHT APPEARS LUDICROUS: TWO SKILLED WARRIORS HACKING DESPERATELY AT A PAIR OF UNARMED SLAVE GIRLS...
BUT THERE IS NO HUMOR IN THE EYES OF THESE VALIANT SWORDSMEN, THERE IS ONLY DISMAY!
--AS THEIR TWO OPPONENTS SUDDENLY BECOME FOUR...
SOTH IN A RAGE! FOR EVERY ONE OF THESE CREATURES WE CUT DOWN, TWO RISE IN ITS PLACE!
BUT THEN...
CLAW! THE EYES! THE ORACLE SAID THEY CONTROL THESE THINGS!
THEN QUICKLY, GHILKYN, PRY THEM LOOSE--WHILE I KEEP THESE "FAIR MAIDENS" AT BAY!
14

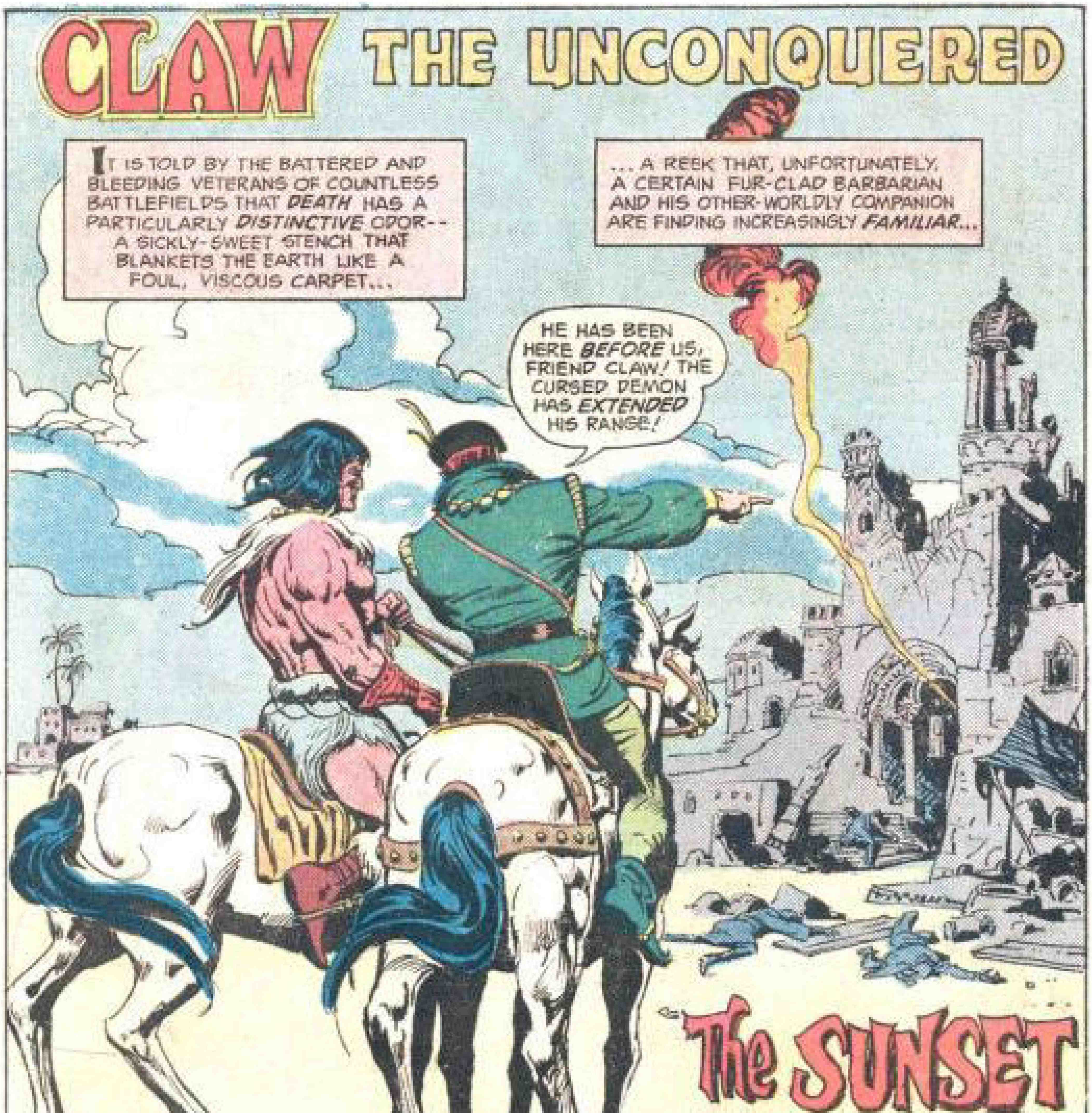

THERE IS AN OLD ADAGE SPOKEN ON A DISTANT WORLD: "IF AN EYE OFFENDS THEE, PLUCK IT OUT!..."
THE PHILOSOPHY OF THAT SAYING IS ONE OF MORALITY, OF ETHICS...
BUT ON THIS WORLD, IN THIS SITUATION, SUCH ACTIONS WOULD BEST BE CONSIDERED IN TERMS OF--
--SURVIVAL!
PLOK
IMMEDIATELY, THE INHUMAN ATTACKERS SURGE FORWARD IN RENEWED FRENZY...
HURRY, GHILKYN! I CAN'T HOLD THEM!
15
BELIEVE ME, CLAW--YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO! -UNGH-
I TRIED IT ONCE, REMEMBER? AND I ASSURE YOU -AGK- IT WAS A MOST UNPLEASANT.-
PLOK
LIKE A MANY-COLORED TEARDROP, THE SECOND GEM CLATTERS TO THE RUBBLED FLOOR BELOW.
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--AND A SOFT CHILLING MOAN BEGINS...
A PITIFUL SOB THAT BUILDS QUICKLY TO SHRIEK FROM A DOZEN QUIVERING THROATS...
THROATS THAT BUT A SHATTERED HEARTBEAT LATER--
OOOOOOOO...AAAAAAAAIIIIIIIEEEEE
--ARE NO MORE...!
THEY'RE GONE! THEN, THE ORACLE IS...DEAD?
AYE, AND 'TIS A PITY, FOR IN TRUTH IT MERELY SOUGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF!
BUT COME, HILL-PRINCE, MORALITY IS ONLY FOR THOSE WITH THE TIME TO INDULGE IT...
THE RETURN TO SAFA GHUL'S LAIR IS MADE IN SILENCE...AND AT JOURNEY'S END...
YOU'VE SUCCEEDED? YOU'VE BROUGHT THE EYES?
HERE, OLD MAN, THEY'RE YOURS TO ADMIRE AT YOUR LEISURE--
--AS SOON AS YOU'VE COMPLETED YOUR END OF THE BARGAIN!
WHAT? OH, YES, THE GRIMSTONE FACET.
WELL, TAKE IT, MAN, TAKE IT! WHAT USE HAVE I FOR SUCH TRINKETS, WHEN I SHALL SOON POSSESS--
--THE KNOWLEDGE OF A GOD!
16


AND THEN, HIS VOICE TREMBLING WITH AGE, THE WIZENED SCHOLAR INTONES WORDS UN-COMFORTABLE TO THE HUMAN PALATE--
--WORDS THAT FILL THE ROOM WITH A VERITABLE TEMPEST OF LIGHT, SOUND AND FURY...
AND IN THE AFTERMATH...
I...I CAN SEE! AFTER ALL THE YEARS OF BLIND IGNORANCE, I CAN FINALLY... TRULY...
...SEE!
HA HAAA, AT LAST! THE KNOWLEDGE OF A THOUSAND MILLENNIA LIES SPREAD BEFORE ME, BEGGING ME TO CHOOSE, TO LEARN!
SIGHTS, SOUNDS, WONDERS BEYOND IMAGINING--SWELLING MY BRAIN LIKE A SPONGE IN A SUMMER STORM!
AND IT'S MINE! ALL MI--
--HUNH?! W-WAIT! I... I DON'T UNDERSTAND! S-SLOW IT DOWN! IT... IT'S ALL COMING...TOO FAST!
WOOOOOO
NO! S-S-STOP! PLEASE! I-IT HURTS! IT--
17

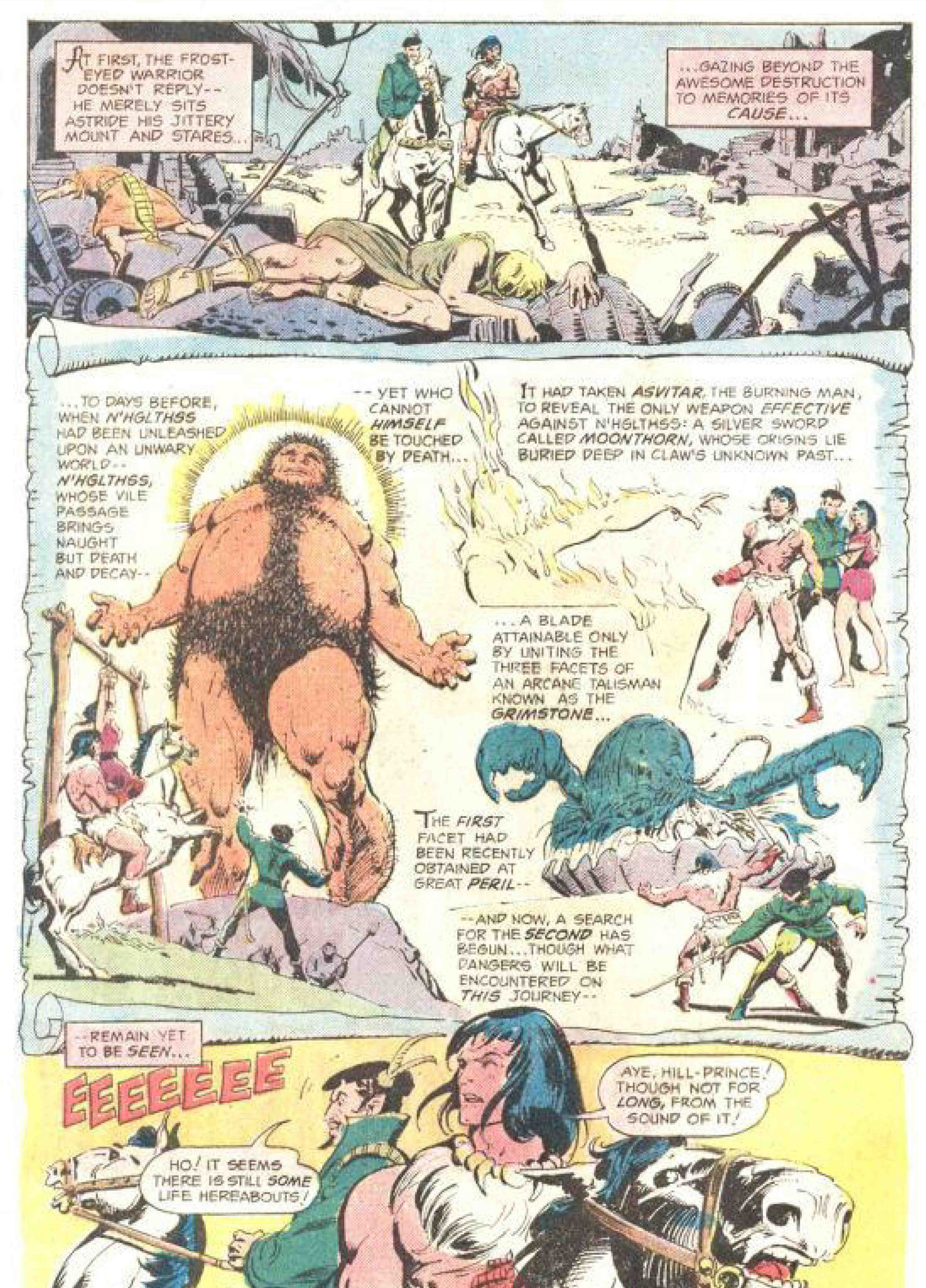


THE EYES! G-GOT TO GET THEM OUT! CAN'T STAND... THE PAIN!
MERCIFUL GODS, PLEASE! H-HELP ME! I-I DIDN'T REALIZE! I DIDN'T--
EEEEEAAAGGGHHH
A MOMENT PASSES, AS THE LAST SCREAMS FADE INTO TAPESTRIED WALLS... AND THEN...
A GRISLY PRICE--FOR THE REALIZATION OF A DREAM.
PERHAPS, HILL-PRINCE, BUT A JUST ONE AS WELL.
FOR EVEN A FOOL SHOULD KNOW THAT IN PUTTING THE MIND OF A GOD--
--INTO THE SKULL OF A MAN--
--THERE CAN BE NAUGHT BUT THE DEVIL TO PAY...
NEXT ISSUE: THE SUNSET DOOM OF DHYLKA-RYN
ON SALE DURING THE THIRD WEEK IN DECEMBER

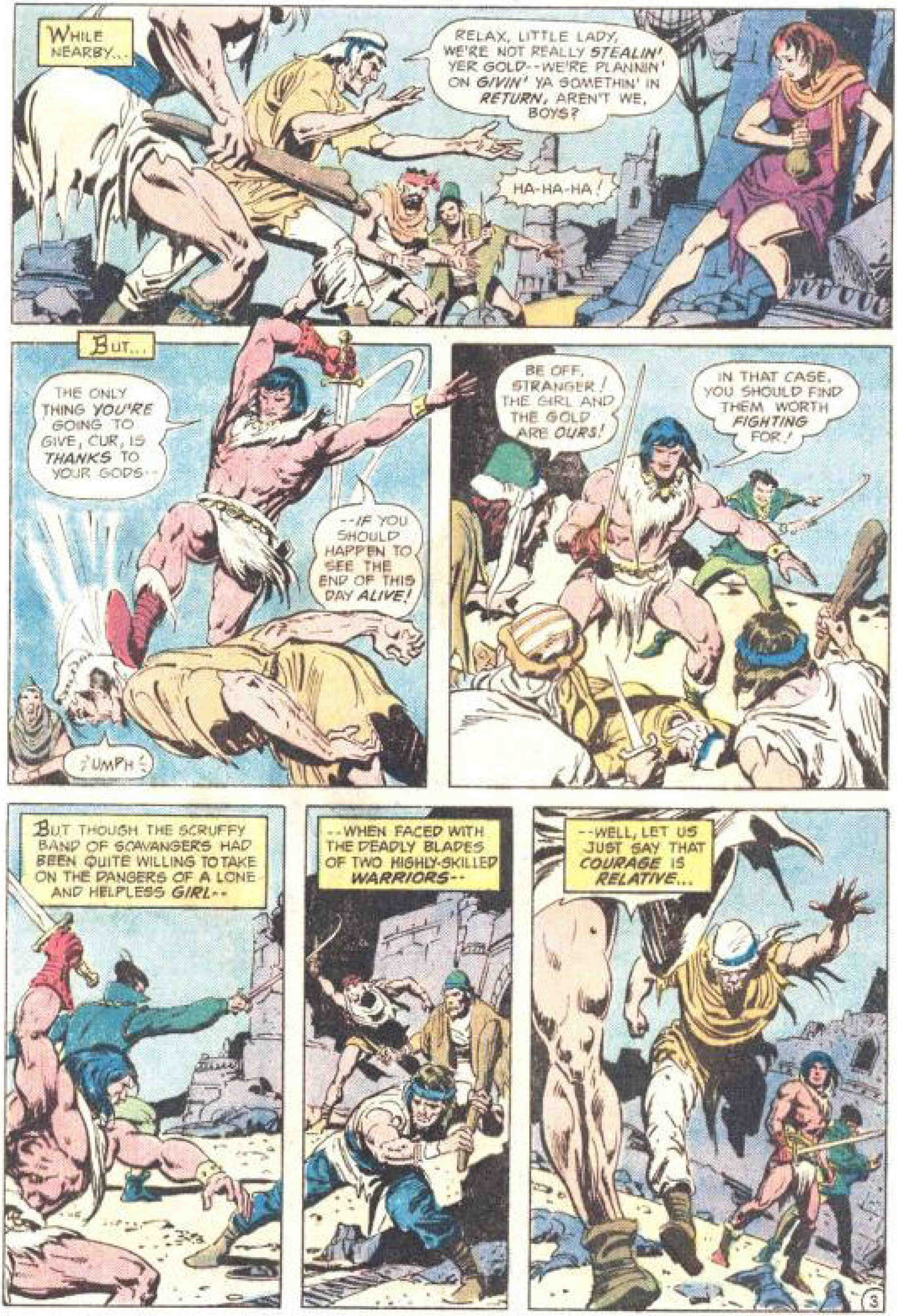


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AT FIRST, THE FROST-EYED WARRIOR DOESN'T REPLY-- HE MERELY SITS ASTRIDE HIS JITTERY MOUNT AND STARES...
...GAZING BEYOND THE AWESOME DESTRUCTION TO MEMORIES OF ITS CAUSE...
...TO DAYS BEFORE, WHEN N'HGLTHSS HAD BEEN UNLEASHED UPON AN UNWARY WORLD-- N'HGLTHSS, WHOSE VILE PASSAGE BRINGS NAUGHT BUT DEATH AND DECAY--
--YET WHO CANNOT HIMSELF BE TOUCHED BY DEATH...
IT HAD TAKEN ASVITAR, THE BURNING MAN, TO REVEAL THE ONLY WEAPON EFFECTIVE AGAINST N'HGLTHSS: A SILVER SWORD CALLED MOONTHORN, WHOSE ORIGINS LIE BURIED DEEP IN CLAW'S UNKNOWN PAST...
...A BLADE ATTAINABLE ONLY BY UNITING THE THREE FACETS OF AN ARCANE TALISMAN KNOWN AS THE GRIMSTONE...
THE FIRST FACET HAD BEEN RECENTLY OBTAINED AT GREAT PERIL--
--AND NOW, A SEARCH FOR THE SECOND HAS BEGUN...THOUGH WHAT DANGERS WILL BE ENCOUNTERED ON THIS JOURNEY--
--REMAIN YET TO BE SEEN...
EEEEEEE
HO! IT SEEMS THERE IS STILL SOME LIFE HEREABOUTS!
AYE, HILL-PRINCE! THOUGH NOT FOR LONG, FROM THE SOUND OF IT!
2


WHILE NEARBY...
RELAX, LITTLE LADY, WE'RE NOT REALLY STEALIN' YER GOLD--WE'RE PLANNIN' ON GIVIN' YA SOMETHIN' IN RETURN, AREN'T WE, BOYS?
HA-HA-HA!
BUT...
THE ONLY THING YOU'RE GOING TO GIVE, CUR, IS THANKS TO YOUR GODS--
--IF YOU SHOULD HAPPEN TO SEE THE END OF THIS DAY ALIVE!
UMPH
BE OFF, STRANGER! THE GIRL AND THE GOLD ARE OURS!
IN THAT CASE, YOU SHOULD FIND THEM WORTH FIGHTING FOR!
BUT THOUGH THE SCRUFFY BAND OF SCAVANGERS HAD BEEN QUITE WILLING TO TAKE ON THE DANGERS OF A LONE AND HELPLESS GIRL--
--WHEN FACED WITH THE DEADLY BLADES OF TWO HIGHLY-SKILLED WARRIORS--
--WELL, LET US JUST SAY THAT COURAGE IS RELATIVE...
3


ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, M'LADY?
Y-YES, I-I THINK SO. BUT WERE IT NOT FOR YOUR NOBLE INTERVENTION--
'TWAS NOT NOBILITY, GIRL, BUT NECESSITY. WE REQUIRE INFORMATION, AND YOU SEEMED THE LIKELIEST SOURCE.
NOW TELL US, HOW MIGHT WE FIND DHYLKA-RYN?
DHYLKA-RYN?! WH-WHY, THAT'S MY VILLAGE! I'VE JUST COME FROM THERE WITH THIS PURSE-- THE VILLAGE TREASURY--TO SEEK AID!
AID, M'LADY? AGAINST WHAT?
A CURSE, MY LORDS! A CURSE WE CANNOT FIGHT ALONE! OH, PLEASE, WON'T YOU RETURN WITH ME? I-I CAN PAY--
WE'VE NO INTEREST IN GOLD, LASS. BUT SINCE WE'VE BEEN TOLD THAT WHAT WE SEEK LIES IN DHYLKA-RYN--
--WE WILL GO WITH YOU.
AND...WILL YOU HELP MY VILLAGE?
AYE...I IMAGINE IT WILL COME TO THAT...
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING
4



AND AS THE SCENE OF DESTRUCTION IS LEFT BEHIND...
I AM GHILKYN, M'LADY, PRINCE OF THE THOUSAND HILLS. MY FRIEND HERE IS CLAW.
AND I AM PFYLAHNA.
HOW LOVELY FOR YOU. BUT IF AMENITIES ARE OVER, PERHAPS YOU'D TELL US THE NATURE OF THIS CURSE WE'RE TO FACE!
OH, C-CERTAINLY. IT ALL BEGAN SOME MONTHS AGO...WITH A LAD NAMED...
"--KURAH SHAN, A SICKLY ORPHAN WHOSE WEAKNESS MADE HIM EASY PREY FOR THE CRUELTIES OF A POOR VILLAGE NEEDING SOMEONE TO FEEL SUPERIOR TO...
"BUT, THOUGH WEAK AND LONELY, KURAH WAS ALSO KIND, AND SO DESPITE EVERYTHING WE BECAME... FRIENDS...
"UNTIL THE NIGHT MY FATHER DISCOVERED US TOGETHER...
"AS A RESULT, KURAH WAS FORCED TO FLEE AMID A RAIN OF STONES AND VILE EPITHETS...
"...AND TO SEEK SHELTER AMONG A SERIES OF CAVES POCKING THE HILLS NEAR OUR VILLAGE --WHERE HE SOON STUMBLED UPON THE LAIR OF A LONG-DEAD NECROMANCER...
"AND, SUBTLY, HE BEGAN TO CHANGE...
5


"FOR APPARENTLY HE LEARNED TO MASTER ONE OF THE OCCULT IMPLEMENTS THEREIN--
"--A *TALISMAN* OF GLOWING GREEN STONE WITH UNUSUAL PROPERTIES...
"IT WAS WITH THIS STONE THAT HE SOUGHT *REVENGE* FOR HIS HUMILIATION--
"--BY CASTING A SPELL OF *ETERNAL TWILIGHT* OVER DHYLKA-RYN...
"IT WAS A MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGEM, FOR WITHOUT SUNLIGHT CROPS COULD NOT GROW, FUEL SUPPLIES GAVE OUT... AND CONSTANT *DREAD* SET IN...
"AND THEN, KURAH *RETURNED*--OFFERING TO *REMOVE* HIS SPELL IF THE PEOPLE WOULD PAY HIM HOMAGE...
"...A PROPOSAL THE VILLAGE LEADERS STEADFASTLY *REFUSED*...
"AND SO KURAH CREATED A CASTLE OF *SORCEROUS LIGHT* AND SAT BACK TO AWAIT OUR *CAPITULATION*--
"--OR OUR DEATH, WHICHEVER CAME FIRST...
"HE EVEN CONJURED SUPERNATURAL *BEASTS* TO GUARD THE TOWN'S PERIMETER, SO THAT *ESCAPE* WAS IMPOSSIBLE...
6



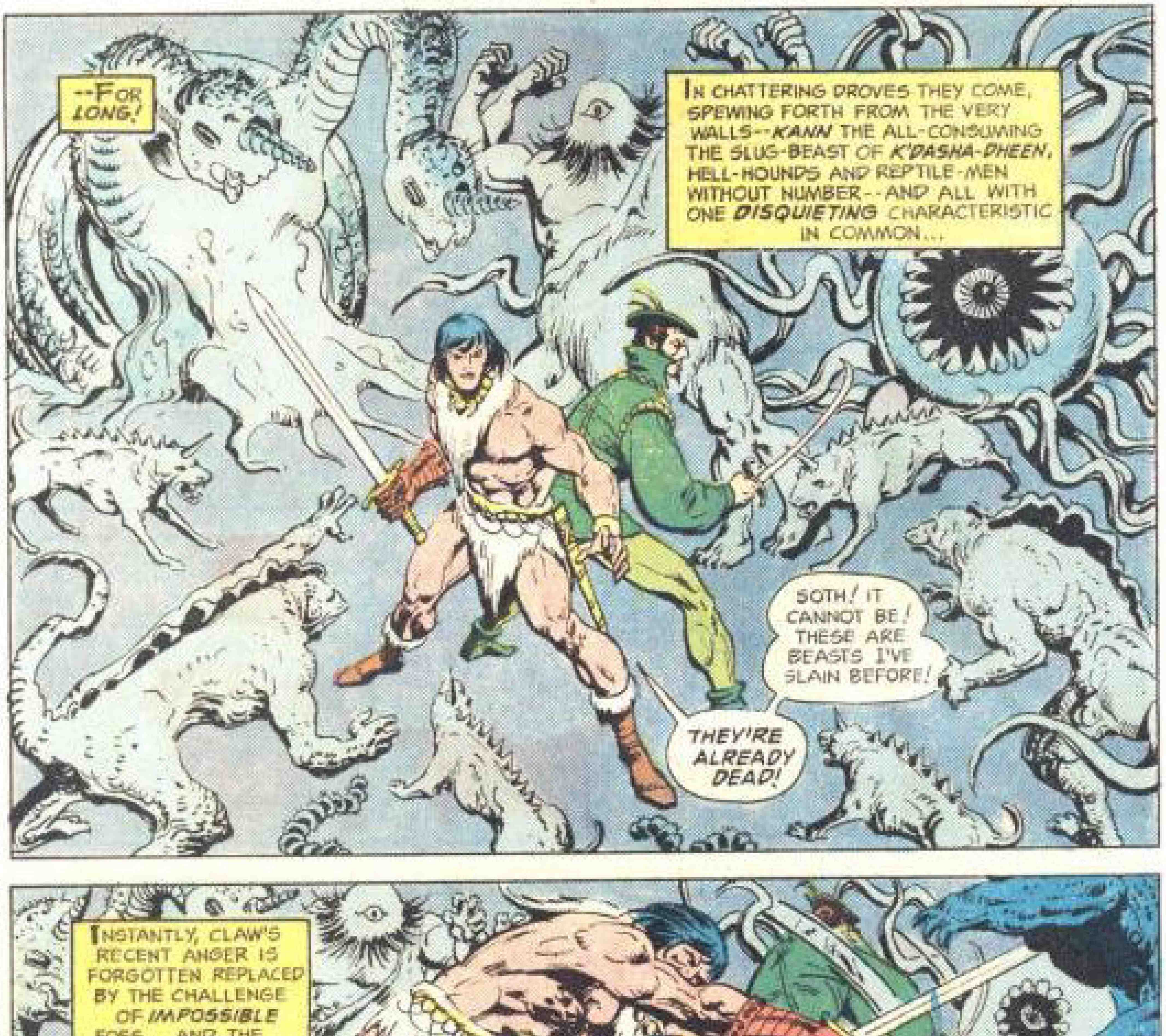
"AND IT WAS THEN THAT I WAS SENT TO GET HELP. FOR SINCE KURAH HAD CARED FOR ME, IT WAS HOPED THAT HIS CREATIONS WOULD LET ME PASS UNHARMED...
"A THEORY THAT THANKFULLY PROVED ACCURATE..."
BUT I CAME NOT MERELY FOR MY VILLAGE'S SAKE-- I CAME FOR KURAH'S AS WELL! HE HAS A KIND SOUL, BUT THIS POWER HAS CORRUPTED HIM!
THEN FRET NOT, GIRL. FOR IF THIS POWER SOURCE YOU DESCRIBE IS WHAT I THINK IT IS-- I'LL BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO TAKE IT AWAY FROM HIM!
SILENCE FOLLOWS THE RIDERS AS THEY PASS INTO THE LUSH HILL COUNTRY OF SCARTORIS--
--WHERE, THOUGH IT BE ONLY SHORTLY PAST MID-SUN, AN UNNATURAL DARK GRADUALLY DESCENDS UPON THE LAND...
...AND SOON...
THIS MUST BE THE FOREST THE GIRL SPOKE OF, THE ONE BORDERING THE VILLAGE!
AYE, THE SHADOWS GROW EVEN THICKER HERE! WE'D BEST MAKE TORCHES BEFORE--
OH, NO! TH-THEY'VE FOUND US!
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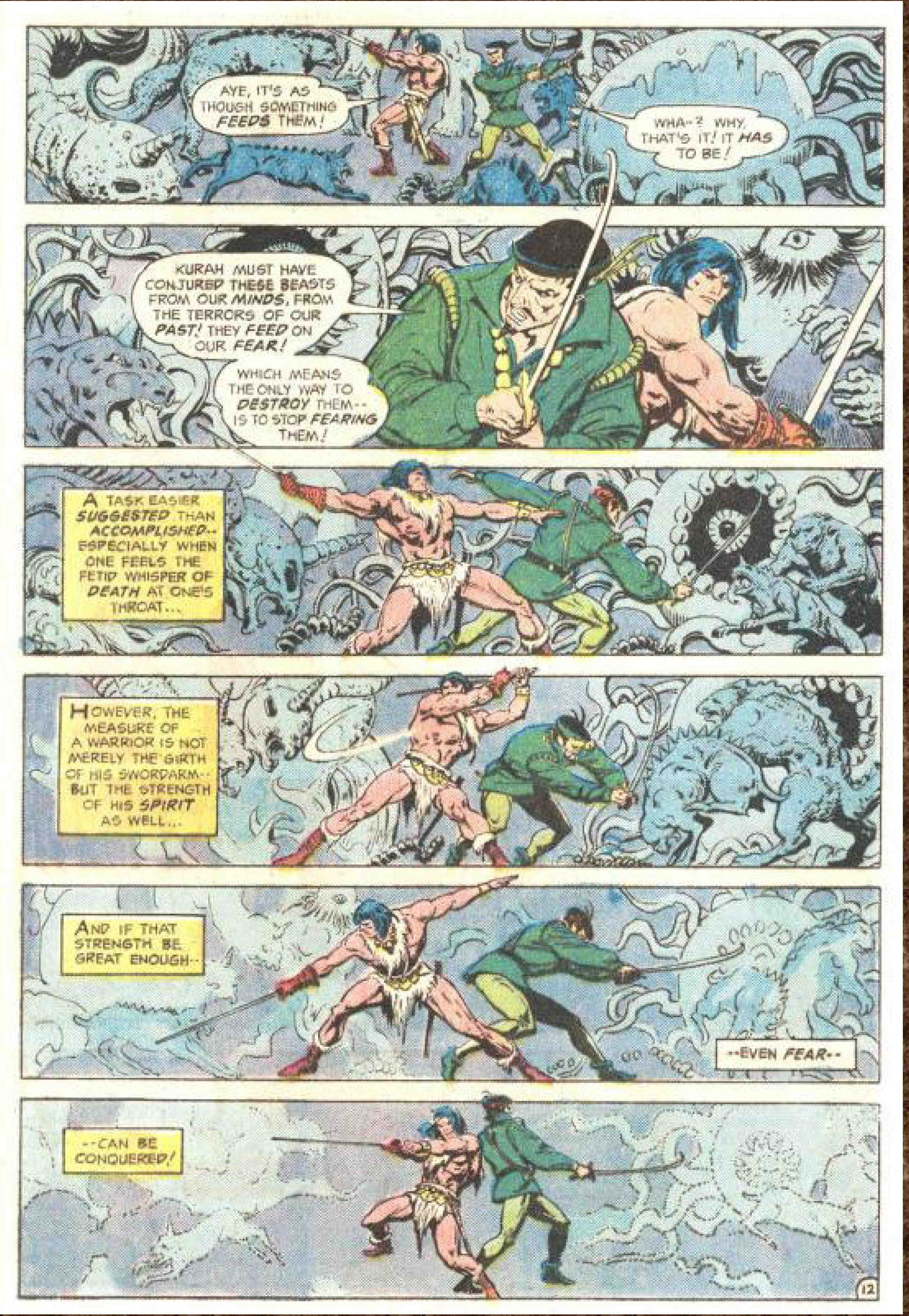

KURAH'S GUARDIANS!
BY THE GODS, THE BOY SHOWS IMAGINATION! THESE BEASTS ARE DISGUSTING!
ALMOST AS ONE, HEAVY BROADSWORD AND CURVED SABER SLICE INTO THE ATTACKING THRONG, SCATTERING TWITCHING BODIES AND FOUL-SMELLING GORE-THICKLY ABOUT THE SCENE--
--BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, ALL TO DISTURBINGLY LITTLE AVAIL...
THEIR NUMBERS ARE TOO GREAT! OUR ONLY CHANCE IS TO REACH THE VILLAGE!
QUICKLY, PFYLAHNA, LEAD THE WAY!
DESPERATELY, THE THREE TRAVELERS SPUR THEIR MOUNTS BETWEEN THE HARD SKELETONS OF TREES--ONLY TOO AWARE OF THE GRISLY FATE THAT WOULD FOLLOW A SINGLE MISSTEP...
...UNTIL FINALLY, WITH WHISPERED BLESSINGS TO SOTH, THE GOD OF CHANCE, THEY AT LAST GAIN THE SANCTUARY OF PHYLKA-RYN--
--AND FIND THAT THE FRIGHTFUL GUARDIANS HALT AT THE TWILIT HAMLET'S EDGE...
8



CONTINUED ON 5TH PAGE FOLLOWING


...A GLOW THAT EMANATES FROM THE TOWN'S CENTRAL COURTYARD--AND A MOST BIZARRE VISION HOUSED THEREIN...
AN EDIFICE OF STRUCTURED LIGHT, AND COLORS AT ONCE AWESOME AND OFFENSIVE TO THE HUMAN EYE...
VERY IMPRESSIVE... IN A VULGAR SORT OF WAY!
BUT BEFORE MORE COMMENT CAN BE MADE, A SECTION OF THE IRIDESCENT WALL SHIMMERS AND...
YOU THERE! YOU ARE NOT OF THE VILLAGE! WHY HAVE YOU COME?
WE COME TO TAKE YOUR POWER KURAH SHAN! FOR WE'VE GREATER NEED OF IT THAN YOU!
OH, REALLY? VERY WELL, THEN, YOU'RE MORE THAN WELCOME--
--TO TRY!
CLAW, LOOK! A DOOR IS FORMING!
THEN COME, HILL-PRINCE! SUCH A GRACIOUS INVITATION SHOULD NOT BE IGNORED!
BLADES DRAWN, CLAW AND GHILKYN STEP CAUTIOUSLY THROUGH THE GENTLY-GLIMMERING PORTAL--
--ONLY TO FIND AN INTERIOR AS STARK AND FEATURE-LESS AS A TOMB...
THOUGH AS ONE MIGHT EXPECT IN A WORLD BEYOND TIME, SUCH A SITUATION WILL NOT REMAIN THUS--
10


--FOR LONG!
IN CHATTERING DROVES THEY COME, SPEWING FORTH FROM THE VERY WALLS--KANN THE ALL-CONSUMING THE SLUG-BEAST OF K'DASHA-DHEEN, HELL-HOUNDS AND REPTILE-MEN WITHOUT NUMBER--AND ALL WITH ONE DISQUIETING CHARACTERISTIC IN COMMON...
SOTH! IT CANNOT BE! THESE ARE BEASTS I'VE SLAIN BEFORE!
THEY'RE ALREADY DEAD!
INSTANTLY, CLAW'S RECENT ANGER IS FORGOTTEN REPLACED BY THE CHALLENGE OF IMPOSSIBLE FOES... AND THE ICY-DARK TOUCH OF FEAR...
...AN APPREHENSION THAT GROWS AS...
GODS OF AWADAKA! TH-THESE THINGS ARE GETTING--BIGGER!
CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING
11


AYE, IT'S AS THOUGH SOMETHING FEEDS THEM!
WHA--? WHY, THAT'S IT! IT HAS TO BE!
KURAH MUST HAVE CONJURED THESE BEASTS FROM OUR MINDS, FROM THE TERRORS OF OUR PAST! THEY FEED ON OUR FEAR!
WHICH MEANS THE ONLY WAY TO DESTROY THEM-- IS TO STOP FEARING THEM!
A TASK EASIER SUGGESTED THAN ACCOMPLISHED-- ESPECIALLY WHEN ONE FEELS THE FETID WHISPER OF DEATH AT ONE'S THROAT...
HOWEVER, THE MEASURE OF A WARRIOR IS NOT MERELY THE GIRTH OF HIS SWORDARM-- BUT THE STRENGTH OF HIS SPIRIT AS WELL...
AND IF THAT STRENGTH BE GREAT ENOUGH--
--EVEN FEAR--
--CAN BE CONQUERED!
12


WHEW! THAT KIND OF WELCOME I CAN EASILY DO WITHOUT!
THEN BY ALL MEANS, LET US FIND OUR HOST--
--AND TELL HIM WHAT WE THINK OF HIS HOSPITALITY!
THE SEARCH IS A SHORT ONE, FOR IN THE VERY NEXT CHAMBER...
AH, I SEE YOU'VE MANAGED TO SURVIVE MY LITTLE GREETING PARTY. ADMIRABLE...
WE COME NOT FOR YOUR ADMIRATION, KURAH SHAN, BUT FOR THE GRIMSTONE ABOUT YOUR NECK!
IN THAT CASE, MY FRIEND, I'M AFRAID I'LL HAVE TO DISAPPOINT YOU. FOR, YOU SEE, I STILL NEED THIS LITTLE BAUBLE!
THOUGH I HAVE NO NEED WHATSOEVER--
--FOR YOU!
WITH A CRACKLE OF ARCANE ENERGY, THE FLOOR OF THE SORCEROUS PALACE ERUPTS WITH EBONY FLAME, RINGING THE STARTLED SWORDSMEN IN A CIRCLE OF HUNGRY BLACK FIRE...
CLAW! H-HOW CAN WE FIGHT SUCH SORCERY... WITH MERE STEEL?!
I DON'T KNOW, HILL-PRINCE! I DON'T KNOW!
13


A GRIM RESIGNATION SETTLES OVER CLAW'S FEATURES THEN, AS HIS BLADE STRIKES FUTILELY AT THE SLOWLY CONSTRICTING WALL OF FIRE--FOR THOUGH HE MAY BE STUBBORN, HE'S NO FOOL...
HE KNOWS HIS DEATH WHEN HE SEES IT...
AND IT IS THEN, AT THAT MOMENT OF ACCEPTANCE, THAT SOMETHING VERY STRANGE BEGINS TO OCCUR--
--AS ICE-BLUE EYES SWIVEL UP INTO UNSEEING SOCKETS--
--A CRIMSON-STEEL GAUNTLET IS PULLED FROM A FUR-TUFTED HAND--
--AND IN A VOICE AS ALIEN AS BREATH FROM THE DEAD, A BOOMING CHANT ISSUES FROM THE THROAT OF THE ZOMBIE-STILL BARBARIAN...
AND IF THESE ACTIONS SEEM STRANGE, THEIR RESULTS ARE MOST UN-EQUIVOCALLY BIZARRE...
ZZRRRRAAEESSHHH
JAGGED, GAPING HOLES SPLIT THE VERY FABRIC OF SPACE CREATING A VACUUM THAT CRIES TO BE FILLED...
14



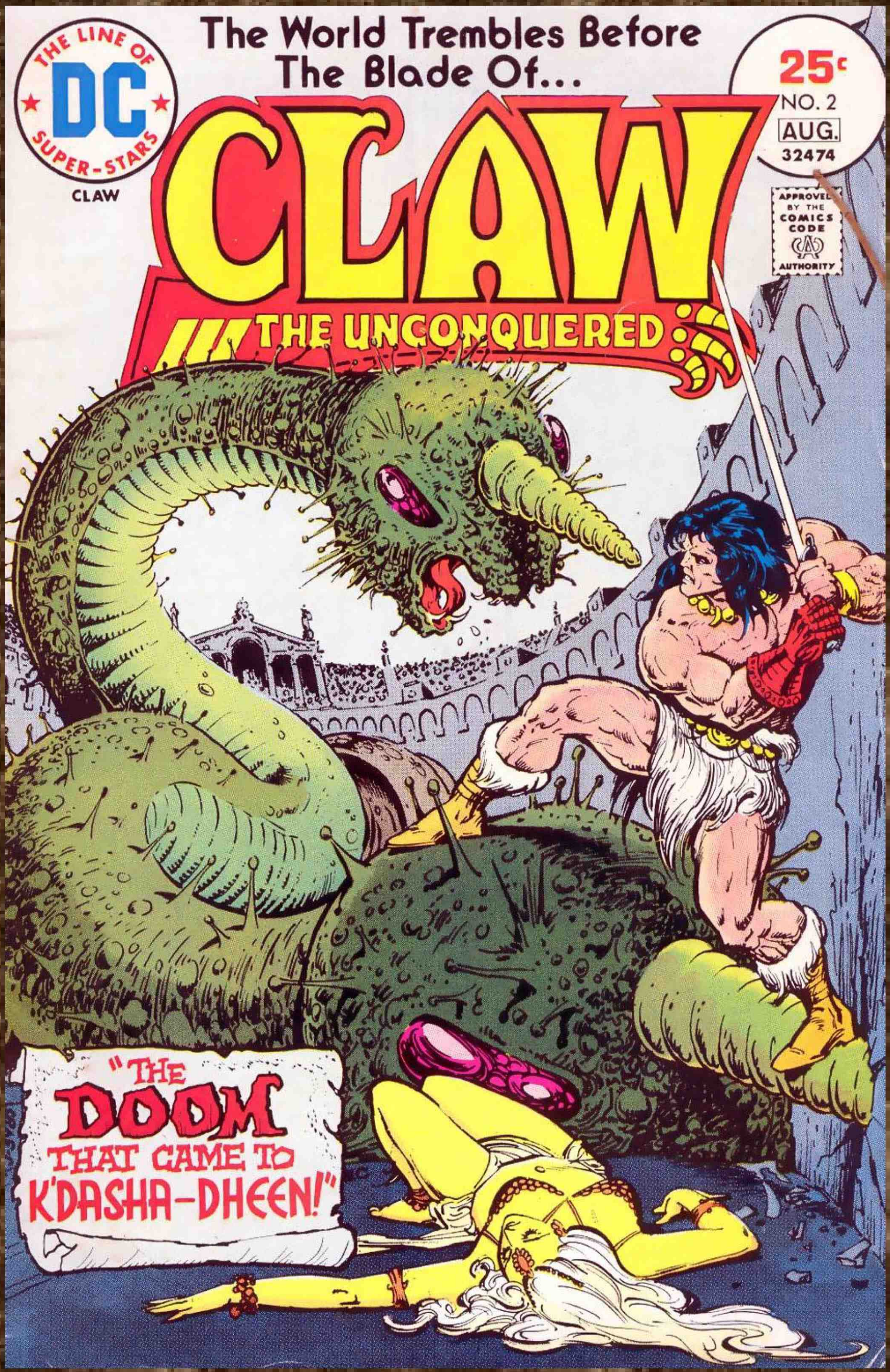
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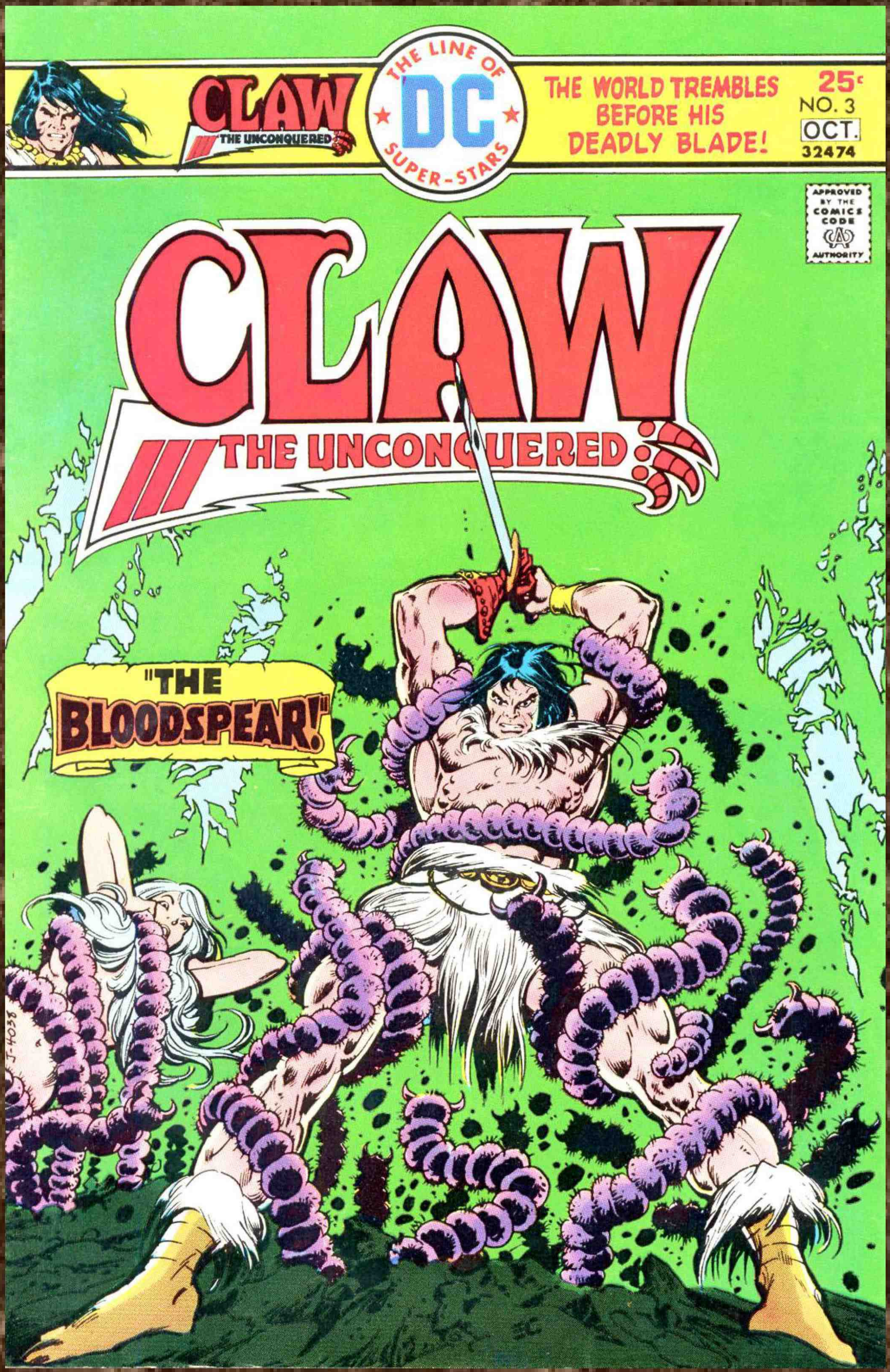

--AS THE FRIGHTENED BOY SOON DISCOVERS...
WHA--?
O-OH, NO! NO! S-STAY AWAY!
THEY ARE CHILDREN OF HIS MIND, GIVEN SOLIDITY BY FEAR-- KURAH SHAN KNOWS THIS...
...JUST AS HE KNOWS THAT THE ONLY WEAPONS AGAINST THEM ARE DEFIANCE, RESOLUTION, COURAGE...
BUT KNOWLEDGE IS ONE THING-- AND THE LESSONS TAUGHT BY YEARS OF MERCILESS PERSECUTION QUITE ANOTHER...
AND SO KURAH MEETS THE CHALLENGE--
--IN THE ONLY WAY HE KNOWS HOW...
P-PLEASE! I-I'M SORRY! I-I DIDN'T MEAN IT! REALLY!
D-D-DON'T HURT ME! P-PLEASE! DON'T--
EEEEEYYYYAAAAGGGHHH
16

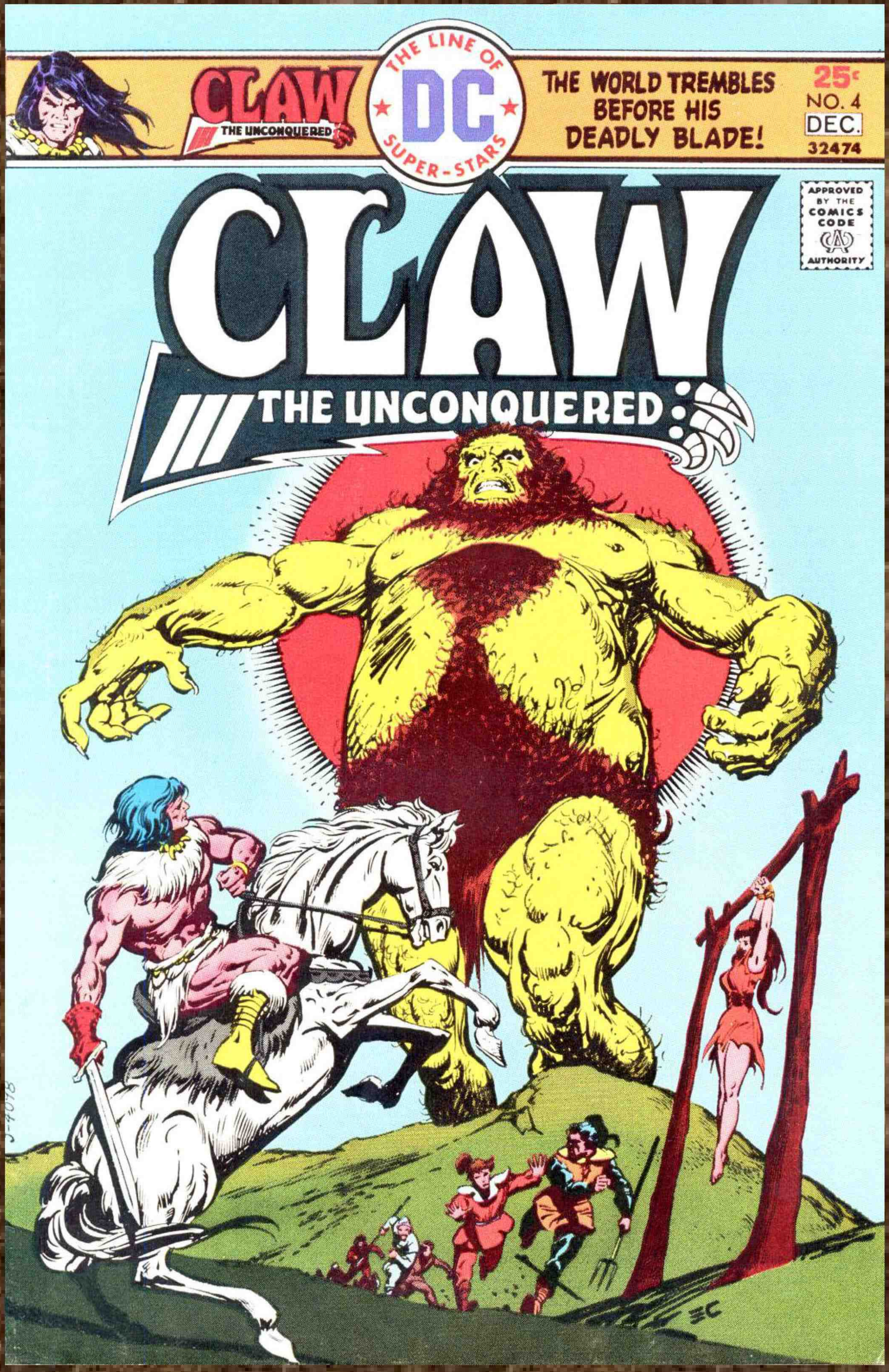

AND AS THE PITIFUL SCREAMS FADE...
KURAH! HE'S BEEN SLAIN--BY HIS OWN FEARS!
AYE, 'TWOULD SEEM THAT DHYLKA-RYN HAS THE FINAL JEST AFTER ALL,
THOUGH AT LEAST THE BOY'S FOUND PEACE--AND FOR THAT I ENVY HIM.
FOR UNTIL I UNDERSTAND THE TERRIBLE POWER THAT LIES IN THIS TWISTED PAW OF A HAND, I KNOW THAT I CAN NEVER REST!
AND SINCE THE SECRET SEEMS TO LIE IN THE TANGLED MYSTERY OF MOONTHORN, I'LL HAVE THAT BLADE!
AND NOT ALL THE DEMONS OF THE SEVEN HELLS WILL KEEP ME FROM IT!
THE SPELL AT LAST BROKEN, THE CASTLE OF INFERNAL LIGHT BEGINS TO DISSOLVE AROUND THE SOLEMN PRINCE AND THE HAUNT-EYED BARBARIAN...
...AND OVER THE SLEEPY VILLAGE OF DHYLKA-RYN, THE SUN BEGINS TO SHINE ONCE MORE...
WELL, IT SEEMS I, UM, UNDERESTIMATED YOUR CAPABILITIES, OUTLANDER. YOU CERTAINLY SHOWED THAT SCRUFFY BRAT THE PRICE OF INSOLENCE.
17

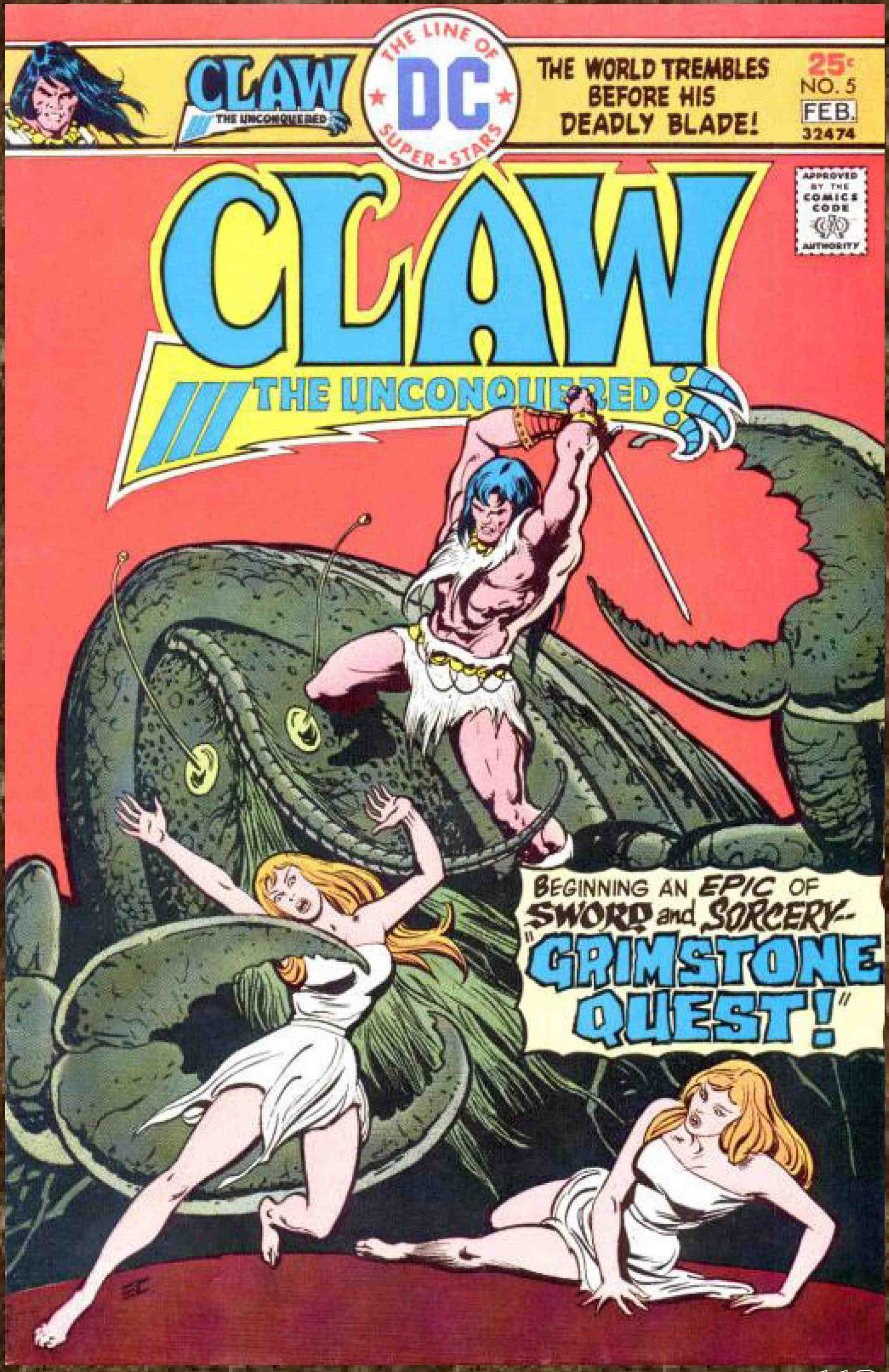



BUT OF COURSE, YOU'LL STAY A WHILE LONGER, IN CASE THERE ARE ANY AFTEREFFECTS OF--
I STAY WHERE I PLEASE, FAT ONE--AND THIS VILLAGE PLEASES ME NOT!
OH, BUT I'M SURE YOU'D FIND LIFE IN DHYLKA-RYN MOST PLEASANT!
PFYLAHNA WOULD SEE TO THAT--WOULDN'T YOU, DEAR?
KWAM
YES, THE SUN SHINES ONCE MORE OVER DHYLKA-RYN, BUT IN SOME CORNERS--
--THE DARKNESS NEVER DIES...
NEXT ISSUE: "THE PEOPLE OF THE MAELSTROM"
(ON SALE THE THIRD WEEK IN FEBRUARY)
18


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